

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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Number Eighty-Two

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THE 1977 CALIFORNIA CABERNET SAUVIGNONS A DROUGHT VINTAGE TAKES NEARLY FORTY YEARS TO BLOSSOM



In the great decade of the 1970s for California cabernet sauvignon, the 1977 vintage is hardly one that immediately jumps to mind when recalling the outstanding years in this glorious ten year run of exceptional growing seasons. And, for many years, this was for good reason. The second half of the decade of the 1970s saw Mother Nature's largess run out to a certain extent, as the stunning trio of vintages of 1973, 1974 and 1975 were followed by two severe drought vintages in a row, 1976 and 1977. The beautifully plush fruit tones and ripe, sturdy and well-integrated structural elements that had defined the great run of cabernets between 1973 and 1975 came to a close with the 1976s, as the hydric stress of this vintage delivered cabernet sauvignon bottlings that were far more overtly tannic and chewy out of the blocks than had been the case in the previous three years. The wines were still greeted with a fairly positive response when they were released into the market a few years later, as the mantra of the blossoming California wine business back in this era was that "there is never a bad vintage in California" and the wines seemed to perhaps have enough fruit stuffing to eventually outlast the tannins. Remember that as the 1976 cabernets started to come onto the market in 1978 and 1979, this was only a couple of years after Steven Spurrier's world changing tasting in Paris in 1976, where California wines really came to international prominence for the first time and became legitimately a world class wine-producing region beyond the perspectives of early specialists in the state's wines.

Additionally, the 1976 vintage also had the added benefit of being from the American bicentennial year, so there was a bit of added market cachet for the vintage, despite its drought characteristics. So, no one in the burgeoning California fine wine trade at this time was about to write off the 1976 cabernet vintage just because the wines were very chewy and bound up in their drought-induced structural elements when young.

However, by the time the 1977s were bottled and ready to ship out from wineries, the market's interest in this particular vintage of cabernet sauvignon was not quite as high as had been the case for the previous year, as the chewy 1976s had now been out on merchants' shelves for a year and were, quite understandably, a bit slower going through the pipeline than the three stellar previous cabernet vintages had been. In addition to also possessing another tannic, rather stern vintage profile, the 1977 cabernets had the additional challenge of being the vintage slotted immediately ahead of the glorious cabernet sauvignon vintage of 1978 that was still resting comfortably in barrel, but was already basking in praise and was soon to find its way into the pipeline. So the long shadow of the 1978s also added to a bit less excitement surrounding the structured young 1977 cabs. For wine lovers who had only really come to realize just how good the wines from the Golden State were with the results at the Spurrier tasting in Paris in 1976, the 1978 vintage was going to be the very first "great vintage" for this varietal that they were going to be able to buy for their cellars right from release, as many of these newly-minted California cabernet collectors had missed out on the bulk of the 1973s, 1974s and 1975s a few years earlier. So, as is often the case, many potential customers for the 1977 vintage of cabernet were already looking past that year in anticipation of the coming release of the superb crop of 1978s waiting in the wings.

The 1977 vintage produced a fairly small crop for cabernet sauvignon, which at this time, was clearly the preeminent varietal produced in California. In these days, Napa Valley was still the undisputed king for cabernet, with a few important outliers in the Santa Cruz Mountains, such as Ridge Vineyards and Mount Eden Vineyards also considered in the very top division, but most of the market's focus was on the Napa Valley for cabernet sauvignon. The severe drought of 1976 had left its mark on the vineyards and the potential yields in 1977 were going to be small from the outset, due to the vineyards' hydric struggles the year before. However, while the twin drought years of 1976 and 1977 are often grouped together in wine lovers' minds these days, the growing seasons were quite different, as the summer of 1976 was hot and sunny and there were numerous days of torrid temperatures, so that roasted fruit tones and sunburnt grapes were also part of the equation in '76, along with the tough, hard tannins from thick skins and dehydrated grapes. In contrast, the growing season of 1977 was cool, albeit very, very dry, and hydric stress often shut down vines for protracted periods during the summer which really did not have any abundance of sugar accumulations to begin with, so early expectations were not particularly high for the cabernet crop going into September of 1977. Happily, a short period of rainy weather arrived as some of the earlier-maturing grape varieties (such as chardonnay) were being brought in, and which was perfectly timed for the lagging and drought-inflicted cabernet grapes still out on the vines. The partially dehydrated, tiny berries sucked up some much needed water to bring "skin to juice" ratios back into better balance, and the vines kicked back into gear from a period of hydric stress-imposed shut down and started the ripening process again very nicely after the early September rains.

So, with the “just in time” rains of the growing season of 1977 helping out the cabernet sauvignon bunches still out on the vine (though not so welcome for producers growing earlier maturing grape varieties), the possibility existed in 1977 to make a bit more classically-styled wines in this drought vintage than had been the case in the previous, equally dry year of 1976. The most fortuitous producers stayed patient and let their cabernet sauvignon hang on the vine until early October, taking full advantage of the reinvigorated maturation process after the rains and were eventually able to craft wines that were approaching the thirteen percent alcohol range. This had seemed like it was going to be an impossibility to realize in the first week of September, as the sugars had never really been able to accumulate properly in the cool, drought conditions of the summer of 1977. While the luckiest and most patient producers were able to approach the thirteen percent alcohol range for their 1977 cabernets, it was not necessary to wait all the way to early October to make good wines, and some of those who were not able or willing to let the bunches hang out quite as long still were able to make lovely wines at a bit lower octane. A good example of how those estates that could not realize customary sugar accumulations still managed to make good wines at lower than usual alcohol levels is the very tasty Silver Oak “Alexander Valley” bottling of cabernet, which only comes in listed at twelve percent alcohol in the 1977 vintage and yet, is still a very pretty wine that has aged handsomely and continues to drink very well today.

In many ways, 1977 was still the very early days for the modern California wine business as we know it today, for many of the earliest pioneers were still at the helms of their original wineries, with people like Joe Heitz still in charge of his family property (though his son David had been the hands on winemaker here since the 1974 vintage), Ric Forman was still at Sterling Vineyards, Paul Draper was at the winemaking helm at Ridge Vineyards and Randy Dunn was the winemaker at Caymus Vineyards. These were truly heady days in the realm of California cabernet sauvignon, as the Robert Mondavi Winery was at the absolute top of its game in '77, Mike Grgich had just left Château Montelena and opened up his eponymous Grgich Hills Winery, Philip Togni was then making wines at Cuvaision, Jordan Vineyards was only crafting their second vintage over in Sonoma, Justin Rutherford was making excellent cabernets at Silver Oak and Andre Tchelistcheff was still in charge at Beaulieu Vineyards. 1977 still saw Joseph Phelps Winery making wines every bit as worthy as their next door neighbor on Taplin Road (Heitz Wine Cellars), Diamond Creek Vineyards was in full stride, Clos du Val was making splendid wines, Tony Soter (later of Spottswoode fame) was then at Chappellet and Tom Burgess was only making his fourth vintage after buying Lee Stewart’s old Souverain vineyards and cellars up on Howell Mountain and renaming the property Burgess Cellars. At this moment in California wine history, there was simply a ton of outstanding cabernet sauvignon producers at the top of their games and more people were arriving in California wine country to stake their claims as well, with the future looking awfully, awfully bright for high quality California wines in general and cabernet sauvignon in particular.

So, the rather lean and stern youthful character of the 1977 vintage of cabernet sauvignon from the top estates in California in this era was hardly a major cause for concern, as many properties were still riding the glorious wave of the enthusiasm garnered by the results of Steven Spurrier’s tasting in Paris in 1976, and with the plush and exceptional vintage of 1978 cabernet waiting in the wings, people were perfectly willing to tuck away some bottles of 1977 cabernets, forget about them for the time being and let time take its course, as there was going to be an

awful lot of very tasty 1978s around in the very near future that could be drunk with relative pleasure out of the blocks and allow the 1977s to hibernate in comfort in collectors' cellars. Recall also that in this era, no one was particularly expecting a young vintage of California cabernet sauvignon to be immediately accessible once the wines hit the market, as wine lovers at this time still expected cabernet sauvignon in particular to be a structured wine (modeled on the classic style of Bordeaux, coupled with the riper and more generous fruit tones of sunny California) that demanded some cellaring time before it would really start to soften up and drink with generosity. Consequently, no one was expectant of cabernets from top producers to not need some extended bottle age before the wines really started to blossom and patience was far more common for customers of these wines in this era than would be the case by the time the stylistic paradigm had flipped in the decade of the 1990s. In this historical context, the chewy and structured 1977 cabernets were able to find a more sympathetic audience than would have been the case if a similarly profiled vintage would have come along fifteen or twenty years later.



The entrance to the cellars at Mayacamas Vineyards up on Mount Veeder.

As I started my career in the wine trade in the early 1980s, I often had a chance to drink California cabernets from the latter half of the decade of the 1970s in my early days in the business, and at this time, the two vintages that were considered the very finest of the decade were the 1978s and the 1974s (with an honorable mention to the 1970s, which seemed like ancient history to me back in 1982 or 1983!). In the early 1980s, most of the suave and very high quality 1973 cabernets were already gone from the market, with a fairly large number probably drunk up by this time, and the powerful and very classic 1975s were respected (and already tucked away in collectors' cellars), but not spoken of with anywhere near the same reverence as

the flashier 1974s and 1978s. However, given the drought conditions that defined both the 1976 and 1977 vintages (albeit, as discussed above, rather differently-styled wines, beyond the fact that both were severe drought years), one could still find these wines languishing in the pipeline or on merchants' shelves in the first half of the 1980s and I had a chance to drink a bit of each vintage in my formative years in the wine trade. Neither vintage particularly impressed me at that time (though my palate was more impressionable than impressive in those days), and I was far more energetic in searching out what few 1978s might still be around and then, of course, drinking them quite promptly, as I was young, learning about wine and did not have the possibility to start building a cellar for several more years to come. The 1977s way back then were tight, chewy and nicely pure, but lacked the sensation of mid-palate generosity that I thought was the defining element of a "great" vintage of California cabernet sauvignon, and so I did not buy many bottles from this vintage back in those days. By the time the second half of the decade of the 1980s arrived and superb cabernet vintages such as 1984, 1985 and 1986 started to appear on the horizon, whatever 1977s left on the shelves of merchants were destined to head to the "close out bins" or collect dust for many more years to come, as there were simply not too many interested customers for this vintage.

It is also worth mentioning that the media coverage of California wines in the early 1980s was nothing like it is today, so there was much less information out there on the wines and wineries then than there is at the present time, so if one did not have a chance to visit and taste at the estates with some regularity (which was out of the question for a junior member of the trade such as myself), then it was harder to make really discerning choices when it came to some of the "forgotten" cabernet vintages of 1976 and 1977. For example, no one ever told me that Philip Togni was still at Cuvaion at this time, Ric Forman still at Sterling or Randy Dunn at Caymus (not that one had a chance of finding any 1977 Caymus cabernet laying around on merchants' shelves, but as for the other two, I remember walking by bottles of 1977 Sterling cabernet sauvignon in a merchants' bin for something like \$7 a bottle and not buying it for my cellar!) and this would have been very useful information to have handy if one were considering picking up a few bottles of orphaned 1977 cabernet sauvignon. Back in these days, the primary wine publications were the then fledgling The Wine Advocate, though Robert Parker had only really just made his reputation by loudly praising the 1982 Bordeaux vintage and had not yet really sunk his teeth into California cabernets, The Wine Spectator (which, in my opinion, was pretty much the same pay to play journal then as it is today and not particularly useful as a buying guide for that reason) and The Connoisseur's Guide to California Wine, which was what I tended to trust more than the others when it came to wines from the west coast. Decanter magazine had started publishing in 1975, but then, as now, California cabernet was hardly their province of specialization. Even Frank Prial, writing about wine for The New York Times, was a died in the wool Francophile and getting him to pay attention, let alone write insightfully about California wine was not yet a possibility. Google Prial's article on California cabernets from May of 1984 if you want to get a good feel for just how poorly these wines were understood (and how utterly disinterested he was) by even the so-called experts back at this time. It was a different world.

One has to remember that it was not only wine journalism that was behind the curve when it came to California wine at this time, as the wine trade was a very different species back in the early 1980s as well, with Bordeaux being the undisputed king of the realm when it came to the world market, Burgundy a niche wine for "masochists" according to Robert Parker, Italian wines

other than Chianti and inexpensive whites like Soave or Verdicchio pretty much ignored outside of Italy itself and California was only just beginning to be considered as possibly a world class wine region in the minds of the movers and shakers in the wine trade. In reality, the top California vintners had already been making great wines *en masse* since the early 1970s, but the region had only really just come out of the woods and into the spotlight after Steven Spurrier's historic tasting in Paris in May of 1976 and the attendant publicity that ensued. And it was not only the very important, positive publicity that the Spurrier tasting generated that was useful, but also, for winemakers in California at this time, they also gained a real sense of confirmation and added confidence about just how good their wines were *vis à vis* the Old World after the results of the Spurrier tasting leaked out. The Paris tasting also brought a lot more new investors to the region and new wineries cropped up overnight, which in many cases tended to dilute the overall quality of wines coming out of the Golden State at that time, as they had to learn the ropes of winemaking and many came from other businesses where they had realized success and were not necessarily sanguine about learning the wine business from the ground up. It was "boom time" in California wine country and I have to believe that it was lost on many of the newcomers that the wines that had put California "officially" on the international map had done so because they were flat out stellar wines.

Since I started View From the Cellar in January of 2006, I have paid plenty of attention to the golden decade of the 1970s for California cabernet sauvignon, but much of my first ten years' worth of writing on this great run of vintages focused on the most illustrious vintages of this span, the 1973, 1974, 1975 and 1978 cabernets. It is only in the last few years that I have been buying and opening bottles of the 1977 cabernets, and I have been very impressed with how these wines have blossomed since their tight and extended periods of hibernation. Of course, I had only really tasted a fair number of 1977s back in the decade of the 1980s and then paid little attention to the wines after that introductory period of trying the vintage, so I have not followed them with any regularity until more recent times. It was really only serendipity that got me to start exploring the 1977 vintage of late, as I would essentially buy bottles at auction from this vintage only as part of research for winery or winemaker profiles in the newsletter, and with features on wineries such as Mayacamas Vineyards, Robert Mondavi Winery and Heitz Wine Cellars, or gifted winemakers such as Ric Forman, Cathy Corison and Philip Togni featuring prominently in the last several years of the newsletter, I felt compelled to try their 1977s when I could come across them for purchase at auction. And, as the reputation for the 1977 vintage has never really been all that high, I was often able to find wines from this year from some of these outstanding producers. Over time, as I tasted 1977 cabernets from some of these aforementioned producers, I started to realize that this was turning out to be a really superb vintage and, despite its very long period of gestation in the cellar, it was now clearly blossoming into yet another outstanding cabernet sauvignon vintage from this very, very gifted decade for California wine.

I had tasted quite a few 1977s leading into the planning stage for this article, but at the end of August I got together with eleven other like-minded wine enthusiasts here in Westchester County to tackle a lineup of sixteen of the top 1977s, which was invaluable for the possibility to compare and contrast styles amongst this lineup of almost universally successful wines. For the drought conditions of 1977 and the variations of attendant willpower of winemaker to let the bunches hang throughout the month of September shaped each wine a bit differently, so there is a fairly wide mix of styles of the best 1977s, even if the wines' quality are all quite high. There

are some leaner, but pure and complex middleweights in this vintage, such as Clos du Val, Cuvaision or Silver Oak, which weigh in between twelve and 12.5 percent alcohol, and there are riper wines that either were picked a bit later, or a touch less affected by the peak drought conditions, which just get over the thirteen percent octane level and are a bit more plush in personality as a result. Wines that fall into this latter category include Heitz “Bella Oaks Vineyard”, Chappellet, Mondavi Reserve and Château Montelena. There are even a few 1977s that are surprisingly ripe, such as the stellar Mount Eden Vineyards bottling, which clocks in at 13.9 percent in this vintage and probably reflects the more sheltered and unique microclimate of its ridge of vineyards high up in the Santa Cruz Mountains. So, there are definitely some variations of style in the top 1977s, despite so many of the wines being clustered at a very similar, high level of overall quality.



A few of the tasters at our August event were quite a bit younger than I am and they were quite surprised by how well the 1977s were drinking at age forty-two, as they have cut their teeth drinking California cabernets from the 1990s and early 2000s and do not have the same expectations for longevity that my generation did when we were being introduced to the wines from the vintages of the 1970s and 1980s. For the vast, vast majority of the 1977s reported on below are now right smack dab in the middle of their apogees of peak maturity and still have decades of life ahead of them. We had a couple of bottles that were getting just a tad long in the tooth at our tasting, but it was really only less than a handful of wines, and the remainder are still in top form and drinking with depth, vibrancy and plenty of structural integrity to cruise along for at least another couple of decades. The Mayacamas cabernet from 1977 is still not even ready

to drink! So, one can see that this has proven to be another very long-lived vintage from the golden decade of California cabernet sauvignon and the wines still merit serious attention when one comes across them at auction today. And, given the market's relative lack of interest for many years in the 1977 cabernets, they can still be found at auction with some regularity and at quite fair prices.

1977 Beringer Vineyards "Private Reserve" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 1977 vintage was the very first where Beringer produced their Private Reserve bottlings of both cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay. The 1977 Reserve cabernet is holding on nicely, but is getting towards the far end of its plateau and will probably begin to decline a bit in the coming years. The bouquet is deep and ripe, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet cassis, dark chocolate, cigar ash, bell pepper and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered in profile, with a plush attack, a good core and still a bit of backend tannin on the long finish. This is not overly complex and is getting just a touch one-dimensional on the finish, but it is a good, solid effort for the vintage and still a tasty drink. 2019-2035+. **89.**

1977 Burgess Cellars "Vintage Selection" Cabernet Sauvignon (Howell Mountain)

If you look at the photos of some of the wines in the lineup of our tasting, you will notice that this particular bottle of 1977 Burgess cabernet is in a chardonnay bottle! I have others in my cellar that are in cabernet bottles, so I assume that they just ran out of bottles at the end of the bottling run and finished up with some chardonnay bottles left at the winery. The wine is very good, but not one of the best of the vintage, coming in at 13.2 percent octane and offering up a complex nose of cassis, cigar smoke, mountain soil tones, chipotle peppers and a touch of cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, still a touch of backend tannin and just a touch of angularity to its structure, probably due to the tannins not getting quite as ripe in the drought as Tom Burgess would have found ideal. But, this is still a good, solid wine with plenty of life ahead of it. 2019-2035+. **89.**

1977 Chappellet Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

Tony Soter did a very, very good job during his early years at Spottswoode, but I had never had the pleasure to sample his wares prior to his arrival there in the early 1980s. He was manning the helm here in this era and his 1977 Chappellet cabernet is outstanding, coming in at a cool 12.7 percent octane, but offering excellent mid-palate depth and plenty of body and structure. The first class bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a dollop of chipotles, mint and a delicate topnote of petroleum jelly. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and almost sappy at the core, with excellent concentration and balance, still a bit of backend, ripe tannin and a very long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is perhaps not quite as complex as wines like Mayacamas or Mount Eden, but it is a first class bottle of mature cabernet in all respects and still has decades and decades of life ahead of it. *Chapeau!* 2019-2050. **93.**

1977 Château St. Jean "Sonoma" Cabernet Sauvignon (Sonoma County)

Back in the decade of the 1970s, Château St. Jean was considered one of California's greatest chardonnay producers, ranked right up there with Stony Hill, Château Montelena, Chalone and Mount Eden Vineyards. Richard Arrowood was the winemaker here at the time and he was pioneering the concept of single vineyard bottlings of chardonnay, as well as doing great work with riesling in a variety of iterations. But, the cabernet from Château St. Jean was decidedly under the radar back then, even to passionate fans of the winery, and this bottle of 1977 is the very first example of this varietal I have ever tasted from the estate. The wine comes

in at thirteen percent alcohol and includes just over seven percent merlot in its *cépages*. It offers up a mature nose of cassis, dark berries, charred wood, still a nod to its youthful bell pepper, a good base of soil, tobacco leaf, just whisper of paraffin, discreet cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and solidly complex, with still a fair bit of tannin, tangy acids and good focus and grip on the long, slightly tarry, but well-balanced finish. This is a good, solid bottle that still has plenty of life in it, but it is slightly blunt in style on the palate, and despite its still impressive depth and length at age forty-two, it is in the good, but not great camp of the 1977 cabernets. That said, it is still a quite enjoyable bottle to drink and has plenty of life still in it. 2019-2045. **87.**

1977 Clos du Val Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

As I mentioned in the introduction, the 1977 Clos du Vall is one of those lower octane middleweights that one can find in the vintage, but it is perfectly successful in its style and a lovely wine with plenty of life still ahead of it. This is always one of the most Médoc-like wines stylistically to be found in Napa in this era, and this is certainly the case with this very good 1977. The wine delivers an aromatic constellation of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, a good base of soil tones, a hint of dried eucalyptus, tobacco leaf and a dollop of upper register paraffin. On the palate the wine is medium-full and only moderately ripe, but poised and balanced, with good intensity of flavor, fine complexity, melted tannins and a long, focused and classy finish. A few of the younger tasters in our group were underwhelmed with this wine at the tasting, as they felt it lacked a little amplitude, but I found it an eminently satisfying middleweight in all respects. 2019-2045. **89.**

1977 Cuvaion Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

Having only found two bottles of the 1977 Cuvaion at auction a few years ago, you would think I would have exercised better restraint after drinking the first one back in the summer of 2016, but my self-discipline only last eighteen months and I had to share this last bottle with some good friends around the table in early January! This was Philip Togni's last vintage at Cuvaion and it is one of his best vintages of cabernet at this winery, which is drinking beautifully at age forty-one and still has plenty of life ahead of it for those with bottles still in the cellar. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite refined, offering up scents of cassis, residual bell pepper, new leather, cigar ash, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, suave and *à point*, with fine focus and balance and a long, complex finish. Lovely juice in its prime. 2018-2035. **92.**

1977 Diamond Creek Cabernet Sauvignon "Red Rock Terrace" (Napa Valley)

The 1977 Red Rock Terrace from Al Brounstein is a very good wine, with lovely complexity on both the nose and palate, good depth at the core, and fine balance, but it is just a touch short on the finish, which keeps its score down a tad. The bouquet is fully mature, offering up a complex blend of red and black cherries, stony soil tones, cigar smoke, chipotles, a hint of saddle leather and a topnote of petroleum jelly. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and quite solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, impeccable resolution, but only moderate length and grip on the complex finish. I like this wine in every respect except its length on the backend, but there is a lot to like here and the wine is drinking very well indeed today. From what I hear, the Gravelly Meadow cuvée from 1977 is even a step up from the Red Rock Terrace, but I have not seen a bottle in a long time. 2019-2045. **91.**

1977 Fetzer Vineyards “Lake County” Cabernet Sauvignon (Mendocino)

The 1977 Fetzer “Lake County” Cabernet Sauvignon is a beautiful middleweight that is still right in the heart of its apogee of peak maturity and drinking splendidly. The wine comes in at a very svelte 12.4 percent octane and offers up a vibrant and complex bouquet of cassis, cherries, cigar ash, a hint of smoked meats, lovely spice tones, a good base of soil and a stylish topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and tangy, with lovey intensity of flavor, impeccable balance and grip, melting tannins and a long, focused and very classy finish. Many thanks to Jake Fetzer of Masút Vineyards who saw my glowing note on the 1974 Fetzer cabernet a few years ago and sent me this bottle of the 1977 from his family’s cellar. Once I started thinking about this project, I kept my hands off the bottle until this summer (it was not easy), so as to have a recent note for the article on the vintage. For those who are not yet aware, Fetzer made really fine and very ageworthy cabernets in the decade of the 1970s and if one comes across these at auction, they are amongst the greatest bargains one can find in the world of mature wines! 2019-2040+. **90.**



Old cabernet sauvignon vines at Mayacamas Vineyards on the top of Mount Veeder.

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

This was my third bottle of the 1977 Bella Oaks Vineyard cabernet from the Heitz family and it has consistently shown beautifully. I am starting to come around to the impression that this is my favorite vintage for this cuvée, though perhaps a few of the younger ones I have in my

cellar will eventually reach this same outstanding level. The bouquet on the 1977 Bella Oaks is very precise and pure, jumping from the glass in a vibrant mix of cherries, allspice, cigar smoke, a touch of cumin, a lovely base of soil tones, a dollop of petroleum jelly, dried eucalyptus and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with tangy acids, a great core of fruit, still a dollop of buried tannins and a long, complex and energetic finish. As the Heitz family does not allow their cabernets to go through malo, this wine is still very bouncy and has tons of life ahead of it. Great juice. 2019-2050. **93.**

1977 Heitz Wine Cellars “Fay Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 1977 Heitz Fay Vineyard bottling is a superb example of the vintage that possesses plenty of potential longevity, despite its drinking beautifully at the present time. Like the 1978 Heitz wines, this really still needs some extended aeration before drinking, to allow all of its elements to unlock on the both the nose and palate. After a good thirty or forty minutes of air the wine offers up a lovely, red fruity nose of cherries, quince, blood orange, woodsmoke, a touch of curry, lovely soil tones, mustard seed, and a gentle topnote of the chipotles to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with impressively tangy acidity adding further vibrancy to the wine. The finish is very long, still a touch tannic and delivers outstanding length and grip. A very high class bottle of Napa cabernet at its zenith, the 1977 Fay Vineyard bottling is one of the most beautifully balanced examples that I have tasted from this drought vintage. 2009-2030. **93.**

1977 Heitz Wine Cellars “Martha’s Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

*The bottle of 1977 Martha’s Vineyard at our August tasting had a weak cork and the wine was a touch oxidized, so I have substituted my most recent note on this wine from the feature on Heitz Wine Cellars a few years back. Based on how the other 1977s have shown in the lead up to this article, I am sure my note is still accurate on the Martha’s Vineyard, but would also suspect that I have underestimated its potential longevity and I would now expect it to certainly last at least as long as the Bella Oaks and Fay Vineyard bottlings, so probably push its window out to 2045 at least. I had never previously tasted the 1977 Martha’s Vineyard, and the wine turned out to be a superb example at its apogee of drinkability. The bouquet is deep and utterly enchanting, as it wafts from the glass in a beautiful mélange of cassis, warm berries, cherries, eucalyptus, woodsmoke, herbs and a lovely, complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and focused, with a seamless palate impression, a lovely core of red fruit, melting tannins, excellent grip and superb complexity on the long, focused and refined finish. A terrific vintage of Martha’s Vineyard, and a wine to keep an eye out for at auction, as the quality of this wine far exceeds its reputation. 2007-2025. **94.***

1977 Jordan Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Sonoma County)

Jordan Vineyards only released their first vintage in 1976, so their second year of 1977 shows just how beautifully this winery did right from the outset. I have had the pleasure to drink this wine twice in the last month and it has shown beautifully both times, with its classic Sonoma signature aromatics and flavors allowing for just a whisper of tobacco leaf-like shadings, coupled with truly beautifully pure fruit and great transparency down to its underlying soil tones. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up a wide open blend of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, lovely soil tones, a hint of chipotle pepper, smoke and just a whisper of upper register weediness so typical of its place of origin. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, tangy acids and a long, complex and absolutely *à point* finish. This is a first class 1977 with decades of life still ahead of it. 2019-2040+. **92.**

1977 Kenwood Vineyards “Jack London” Cabernet Sauvignon (Sonoma County)

The Jack London Vineyard bottling from Kenwood was their top wine back in this era, and I was quite curious to taste this wine, as I had never previously had the pleasure to taste a Jack London cabernet from this fine Sonoma winery. The wine has aged quite nicely, but is perhaps one of the 1977s that has been mature a bit longer than the majority and will probably want drinking up in the next ten to fifteen years. That said, there is still plenty of pleasure to be found here, as the wine offers up a complex nose of cassis, charred earth, a bit of residual bell pepper, smoke, cigar ash and just a whisper of inkiness. On the palate the wine is complex, full-bodied and fully mature, with melted tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. The touch of remaining tannin show just a shading of chewiness that indicates that the wine just got over the finish line in terms of ripening up the tannins, which for some of the tasters in our group was a flaw they could not overlook, but for my palate, this was not a big issue and I quite enjoyed the wine for its complexity and good structural foundation. 2019-2035. **88.**

1977 Mayacamas Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Mount Veeder)

I had last tasted a bottle of the 1977 Mayacamas cabernet all the way back in 2007, in the lead up to my historical feature on Bob Travers and his brilliant career here. In proper Mayacamas fashion, the wine has not moved forward in terms of evolution a whole lot since that time, and several of our younger tasters were not impressed with this wine at our event in August. Interestingly, though I double-decanted the wine at 11:30 in the morning, it was still closed when we got to it at around 2:30 in the afternoon and probably should have been left in decanter to air for two or three hours to really let it open up. As I was slow getting my notes written up, I had the advantage to not taste this wine until it had been in my glass for at least another thirty minutes and I saw a much more open wine than those tasting faster than me at the table, but this wine is still emphatically not yet ready for primetime drinking! However, all of the constituent components are in place for a superb bottle in a few more years, as the nose is already very complex, delivering scents of cassis, dark berries, chipotle peppers, cigar smoke, a complex base of mountain soil tones and a nice touch of upper register spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and soil-driven, with a fine core, nascent complexity, still some chewy tannins and superb length and grip on the focused and impeccably balanced finish. The label of our bottle of the '77 was torn right where the alcohol level is listed, so I do not know the octane here, but I would guess that this came in around 12.5 percent in this vintage, so the wine does not have quite the same core amplitude as riper vintages, but this is still a first class example of the vintage in the making. Just give it a bit more bottle age! 2023-2075. **92+.**

1977 Robert Mondavi Cabernet Sauvignon “Reserve” (Napa Valley)

I have long enjoyed the 1977 Mondavi Reserve cabernet, so I was very happy to see it included in our August lineup, as I had not drunk a bottle since 2012. Time does not seem to have touched this lovely wine at all, as this bottle was in beautiful shape and delivers impressive breed and complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine mix of red and black cherries, eucalyptus, a nice touch of Rutherford Bench soil, cigar smoke, petroleum jelly, eucalyptus and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with lovely focus and grip, melting tannins and impressive length on the poised, balanced and complex finish. First class juice from the golden age at Mondavi. 2019-2050. **93.**

1977 Château Montelena “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 1977 Château Montelena “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon is one of the riper wines from Napa in this vintage, coming in at 13.4 percent alcohol and offering up fine depth on both the nose and palate. The wine delivers a lovely aromatic combination of red and black cherries, pretty spice tones, cigar smoke, dark soil elements, a touch of petroleum jelly and just a whisper of road tar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite long on the backend, with fine focus and grip and still a bit of ripe tannin perking up the finish. This is a top vintage of Montelena cabernet that is now at its peak, but still has tons of life left. 2019-2050. **92.**

1977 Mount Eden “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 1977 Mount Eden Vineyards bottling of cabernet sauvignon was the ripest in our lineup this past August, as the wine comes in at 13.9 percent, which is quite unprecedented in this vintage. The wine was the first vintage made after Merry Edwards had left the winery (she made the wines here from 1973 through 1976) and Dick Graff, from Chalone, was consulting on the winemaking at this time, though Bill Anderson was on board as the full-time winemaker and made both the 1977 and 1978 vintages at Mount Eden. The 1977 cabernet is stunning, offering up a deep, complex and beautifully pure bouquet of black cherries, sweet cassis, a touch of eucalyptus, a superb base of mountain soil tones, cigar smoke and a dollop of sealing wax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off very impressive mid-palate depth, with great mineral drive, impeccable balance and grip, still a wisp of backend tannin and a very, very long, very classy finish. This is one of the best wines of the vintage and still has decades of life ahead of it. 2019-2050+. **95.**

1977 Joseph Phelps Vineyards “Eisele Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

Like the Mayacamas, the 1977 Eisele Vineyard bottling from Joseph Phelps Vineyards was still quite young for its age and needed some extended aeration to really start to stir. Again, as I was so slow finishing up my notes, I reached this wine long after my colleagues at the tasting and benefited from this, in my opinion. By the time I reached the Eisele, it was starting to blossom nicely, after being a bit monolithic when first served, and eventually offered up a very good nose of cassis, a touch of eucalyptus, dark soil tones, chocolate, cigar smoke and a topnote of chipotle peppers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, still some ripe tannin waiting to resolve, lovely balance and a long, nascently complex and still quite promising finish. Like the Mayacamas, I would be inclined to give the Phelps Eisele at least a few more years in the cellar to further blossom, as it is only on the cusp of its peak and has decades ahead of it and is still climbing! A very, very good example of the vintage. 2021-2050. **93+.**

1977 Martin Ray Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

By 1977, Martin Ray had been forced out at Mount Eden Vineyards and was getting by making wines from purchased grapes. His 1977 cabernet was produced from a roughly fifty-fifty blend of grapes from the Stelzner Vineyard in Napa Valley and Howell Mountain fruit. The wine is thirteen percent in octane, and though it was starting to fade a bit and showed a hint of oxidation on both the nose and palate, it was quite easy to see that the wine was very good back in its heyday. Today, the bouquet is a nice mix of black cherries, violets, cigar smoke, a nice touch of soil and the aforementioned hint of oxidation. On the palate the wine is still full-bodied and complex, with a nicely sappy core, melted tannins and good length on the velvety finish. This wine is now starting to fade, but it was clearly quite good at its peak and if one could come

across a magnum of this wine today, I am sure it would still be excellent and would merit a score five points higher. 2019-2025+? **85.**

1977 Ridge “York Creek” Cabernet Sauvignon (Spring Mountain)

I had drunk several of the York Creek bottlings of cabernet from the decade of the 1970s from Paul Draper at Ridge Vineyards on previous occasions, but I had never had the 1977 before our tasting in August. The wine was hitting on all cylinders and really, really excellent, coming in at 13.1 percent octane and delivering a superb bouquet of cassis, sweet dark berries, cigar smoke, good soil signature, a touch of new leather and a nice dollop of mint in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite velvety on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip, melted tannins and a long, complex and very classy finish. The tannins have melted nicely away here, but the wine is still quite sound structurally and is so well balanced that it will have no trouble continuing to drink beautifully for many years to come. Lovely juice. 2019-2045+. **90.**



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

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.**

1977 Sterling Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The 1977 vintage was the very last that Ric Forman saw all the way through from spring pruning to bottling at Sterling, so even though he made the 1978s here, this was the last vintage that he actually had a chance to finish and bottle. The wine is absolutely superb (no surprise here), as it offers up a deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, petroleum jelly, Rutherford dust, a lovely base of soil tones, cigar smoke and a nice touch of chipotles in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and perfectly resolved today, with a lovely core, melting tannins and very fine length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. A lovely bottle with decades of life still ahead of it. 2014-2040. **92.**

THE BURIED TREASURE OF AGED GERMAN RIESLING KABINETT



After a long, long time in the popularity wilderness, Kabinett level wines have been making a comeback in the last few years, as many new German wine lovers- many of whom have found their way to these beautiful wines through the prism of dry Riesling and particularly Grosses Gewächs bottlings and are only now starting to discover just how good Kabinetten can be. As I have mentioned in the past when writing about German wines, the wine drinkers of Germany took a long time to come back to the wines of their home country, as ten or fifteen years ago very few people here in the general wine-drinking public wanted to opt for bottles of Riesling from German soils. In fact, dry Italian white wines were probably the most popular white wines in Germany throughout the 1990s and first decade of the 2000s, and it is really only in the last decade that the German domestic wine market has really discovered their own wines in a big way. The primary reason for this is the profound changes and improvements (at least to my palate) for most dry Rieslings during this relatively new era of Grosses Gewächs and other dry, similarly-styled bottlings (Grosses Gewächs is a term for Grand Cru that is reserved exclusively for members of the VDP ring of producers, and there are many outstanding estates crafting exquisite dry Rieslings who are not members of the VDP, such as Julian Haart who cannot officially use the term for their top grand cru bottlings of dry Riesling). In comparison to

Trocken bottlings from the decade of the 1980s, when the wines often would start out rather severely “dry” and almost borderline sour to my palate, today’s dry Rieslings are far more balanced out of the blocks than those wines of yesteryear and it takes only a good palate, rather than a profound lack of faith, to see what beautiful wines lie in store down the road! In fact, many of those extremely austere Trocken wines from that era and earlier did eventually age into excellent wines with very long cellaring, but when one was tasting them young back in the day, a great many left the impression of hooking up the jumper cables to the car battery and then putting the other ends into your mouth.

However, the dry Rieslings of Germany today, at least from the very finest practitioners of the art, bear little or no resemblance to those brutally brisk young wines of yesteryear and they deservedly are credited with helping the German wine market rediscover its own wines. The top dry Riesling bottlings have also now found a very loyal and sophisticated international clientele and there are plenty of savvy collectors who have responded to the development of premature oxidation issues with some of their favorite dry white wines from France and other wine regions by starting to stock the cellar nicely with dry German Rieslings. And with each passing year, they are going to be happier and happier that they have these wines in their cellars! However, back here in Germany (where I am starting to work on this article, during an “off day” on the tasting trail), a great many of the wine drinkers that are drawn to the Grosses Gewächs bottlings are starting to discover that Germany also produces another style of dry white wine that is also seriously of interest, and that is the classically styled wines of the Kabinett Prädikat. Many of the newer fans of German dry wines here in their home country are discovering that as great as bottles of Grosses Gewächs can be when drunk young, they can also be a bit powerful in their youth and are really best-suited for pairing with various cuisines at the table. In the last few years, these same wine drinkers are starting to take note that Kabinett often gives about the same perception of relative “dryness” as Trocken wines, as their higher levels of residual sugar are often beautifully countered by bright acids and excellent minerality, and Kabinett wine has become more popular to serve, particularly as an aperitif, as its alcohol level is often in the eight or nine percent range and the wines are lighter and more refreshing when served on their own or with a few *hors d’oeuvres*.

This upsurge in interest in Kabinetten has been good news for many German wine producers, for with global warming making some of the steeper slopes with the finest, riverside southerly expositions not particularly well-suited for the production of Kabinett (as the grapes ripen a bit better than what is ideal for the delicate, filigreed style of this Prädikat level), some of the long-abandoned, back valleys of vines are starting to be rediscovered and cultivated again, specifically to produce Kabinett. This has helped to add more momentum to the production of more Kabinetten wines in that classically ethereal and delicate style, which Klaus-Peter Keller likes to call “as light as well water and more refreshing”, and the growing levels of production of first class Kabinetten bottlings are finding a very happy and willing audience. Beyond the beautiful merits of these wines on a qualitative level, they also happen to offer some of the most profound values in the entire world of wine today, as, for example, the great Kabinetten bottlings from Weingut Willi Schaefer from the 2018 vintage were listed on their sales list when I was last at the estate in the twenty euros per bottle range. One simply cannot match that kind of value in the Côtes de Beaune, Pessac-Léognan or in California! However, what still has not seemed to have dawned on these new legions of Kabinett fans in the market is just how beautifully these

wines develop with bottle age, and way too many are still drunk in the first blush of youth and not all that many seem to be destined to be tucked away in a cool corner of the cellar and allowed to unfold their inner layers of complexity extended bottle age. With that in mind, I thought it might be interesting to start to work on a piece on aged Kabinetten and have been happily working away on this project now for the better part of a year.

I was certainly to be grouped in the subset of German wine lovers who did not let their bottles of Kabinetten sufficiently blossom with cellaring back in my formative years buying and drinking German Rieslings. Interestingly, most producers in Germany were also in this category, and when preparing this article and asking winegrowers about the possibility of tasting an example or two of older Kabinetten, many responded “we are only starting now to lay in more Kabinett for our libraries, as in the past, we did not save enough of these bottles!” I used to buy my fair share of Kabinett level wines from my earliest days of collecting these wines, which really started with the 1985 vintage, but I would often pop the Kabinetten bottles early on, in the hopes that it would help me keep my hands off of the Spätlesen and Auslesen in my cellar. This was not always an effective strategy, as I also plowed through an awful lot of those other two Prädikat level wines in their charming youthful periods of development, but I did at least make the effort by grabbing young bottles of Kabinetten with quite some frequency in my formative years of Riesling drinking. But, for the first twenty years of my history of cellaring German wines, ten years out from a given vintage, there was simply not a bottle of Kabinett to be found in my cellar. So I am quite empathetic to those today who like to drink their Kabinett right out of the blocks. However, there is an amazing world of development hidden in all the top examples of Kabinett produced from the top producers and many of these wines are not really into their peak periods of drinkability until at they are at least twenty years of age, and lasting forty or fifty years is effortless for a top flight bottle of Kabinett.

The original tasting foundation for this article was supplied by Johannes Selbach of Weingut Selbach-Oster in Zeltingen in May of 2018, as he organized a fine, fine vertical tasting of Kabinetten from his family’s estate and a few others during last year’s Mythos Mosel events. As I was already working on an article on aging Spätlesen at that time, I just tucked my notes away from that tasting and put this project on the back burner for the time being, as it seemed to make sense to wait a year and ask some other of my favorite producers here in Germany about the possibility of tasting a few examples of mature Kabinetten after tasting through their lineups of 2018ers, and make the depth of notes in this article all that much richer with a bit of patience. This approach also allowed me to avail myself once again to probing the amazing depth of older German wines at the Zeltinger Hof restaurant here in the middle Mosel, as there are some serious treasures to be found there in the Kabinetten section of that deep, deep wine list! I should mention that as I was leaving Germany at the end of March to return to New York, the Zeltinger Hof’s proprietor, Markus Reis, was telling me of a new cellar of old Rieslings he had just bought and was about to add hundreds and hundreds more mature selections to his already fabulous wine list. So, I may have to do a second installment of this report!

While Kabinett is a wine that has long aged brilliantly, there is one potential storm cloud on the horizon in this regard with newer vintages of this Prädikat level, as for the last decade or two, more and more producers have been choosing to bottle their Kabinetten wines under screwcap. The reason for this is quite simply monetary, as Kabinett still continues to sell at a

very low price relative to other great, ageworthy German wines, and screwcaps are a lot cheaper than top quality, single punch corks. A single top of the line cork now costs well over a euro, and this is simply an impossibility for a finished wine that is going to sell for anywhere from ten to twenty euros a bottle! It remains to be seen how many screwcap-enclosed bottles of Kabinett will be able to repeat the performances of their previous generations that were sealed under cork, and we may not see anywhere near as many Kabinetten aging so brilliantly as we can find today with wines from the decades of the 1980s and 1990s. Happily, some of Germany's most talented Kabinett artisans, and staunchest partisans of this Prädikat level, are also vehemently opposed to bottling their Kabinetten under screwcap, so there are always going to be very ageworthy Kabinetten available under cork from folks such as Julian Haart, Katharina Prüm, Klaus-Peter Keller and many others, so even if the number of great Kabinetten available under natural cork has decreased a bit in recent times, there are still going to be plenty of the very best examples available with their traditional closure and built to cellar brilliantly for half a century or more!

As my dislike for screwcaps is pretty well known, no one opened up any older Kabinetten on my most recent German visit that had been stored under screwcap to attempt to disprove my hypothesis that these wines are not going to age anywhere near as well under screwcap as under cork, but Johannes Selbach has quipped in the past that he has plenty down in the cellar and we can happily work through a range of screwcap-sealed, older Kabinetten on a future visit. Happily, it was all older Kabinetten under natural cork that I was finishing up my winery visits with on this last visit to Germany, and I truly tasted some remarkable wines. My gut instinct regarding Kabinetten and screwcaps is that prices for this Prädikat level are going to have to rise a bit for producers to no longer feel the market impetus to opt for screwcaps, and though I am generally very much a partisan of keeping prices down for wines (having been priced out of many of my very favorite bottlings from other regions in the last decade or so), I would much rather see a moderate price rise for classic Kabinetten and the end of the potential problems with permanent reduction and screwcaps with this level of Riesling in Germany. Even without the question of closure choice, it seems inevitable that the prices for Kabinett are going to have to rise a bit in the coming years, for in many cases, it is simply not economic for producers to continue to produce great Kabinetten and still sell them at their current price levels. Kabinett is no less costly to produce than Spätlese or Grosses Gewächs, but the pricing differential is truly dramatic these days- particularly between GGs and Kabinetten. So, for collectors who have a fondness for great Kabinetten, now is the time to really be stocking up the cellar, as today's price levels for these wines are likely to look like unbelievable bargains a decade down the road, especially if more and more Grosses Gewächs customers continue to discover just how beautiful Kabinetten wines can be!

The following notes are arranged chronologically by vintage, and alphabetically by producer. I have made no effort to group wines by their regions. As I mentioned above, many winegrowers in Germany do not keep all that many examples of Kabinetten in their cellars and hence, not everyone who I approached about being able to taste a couple of older examples had the same depth of options available in the cellar, and hence, some of the wines we tasted were still fairly young (as this was all that they had still extant at the Kabinett level in the library) and would not have necessarily qualified for what I consider "properly aged Kabinetten", but as they were kind enough to open the bottles, I have included them here. I have augmented what I have tasted at the Kabinett level during my last couple of trips to Germany with an older Kabinetten

tasting I organized back here in New York with my friends who also love to age this Prädikat level. What I hope the following tasting notes will convey is that Kabinett is one of the most unique wines in the world in that it is absolutely delicious to drink young (and hence why I no longer have any bottles from the 1980s in my cellar at this Prädikat level, despite buying plenty of examples!), but also has the potential to age for a very, very long time and is indeed, today, the world's greatest white wine bargain for long-term cellaring. To my palate, the beauty of top Kabinetten from the decade of the 1980s and early 1990s today strongly suggests that as good as these wines are to drink young, the real apogee of peak drinkability for Kabinetten does not really arrive until the wines are at least fifteen to twenty years of age, and once they reach their plateau, they have decades and decades still ahead of them!



When it comes to long-lived Kabinetten in Bernkastel, "The Doctor Is In."

I should also mention that this report does not include some of Germany's finest contemporary producers of Kabinetten, as their estates are still so young that I did not want to ask them to open bottles when I was visiting of wines that are still very much infants and will be much better left alone in the cellars for another decade or two. Consequently, people like Julian Haart and Constantin Weiser and Alexandra Künstler of Weingut Weiser-Kunstler, are not represented in this feature, despite the fact that I am firmly convinced that both estates are making some of Germany's most brilliant examples of Kabinetten today. At a few other estates on my recent trips to Germany, the size of the tastings of the new vintage were already sufficiently large and long enough that I did not want to ask to taste older Kabinetten after such large collections of 2018ers, so I do not have notes on any older Kabinetten from Klaus-Peter Keller or Hofgut Falkenstein here either, despite both estates also making truly brilliant and utterly classical examples of this Prädikat level today. And, as I mentioned in my report on the

2018 vintage in the last newsletter, Dr. Carl von Schubert did not answer my flurry of emails over several weeks about the possibility of visiting the estate in March of this year, so I did not have the chance to see if he would be amenable to opening a few older bottles of Kabinetten out of the cellars. As many of the Maximin Grünhäuser Kabinetten from the decades of the 1980s and 1990s remain numbered amongst the greatest examples of this Prädikat level that I have ever tasted, it was unfortunate not to have been given the opportunity to visit this iconic estate.

2017 Monzinger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

Werner Schönleber noted that he did not have too many older Kabinetten in the cellar, but he did very kindly find three fairly recent vintages to taste through for inclusion in this article. The 2017 Monzinger Kabinett comes in at 9.5 percent alcohol in this vintage and offers up a lovely and very precise nose of lime, tart orange, gentle botanicals, a complex base of minerality, citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and more filigreed in personality than the 2018 version that preceded it in our tasting, with bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and classically balanced finish. Fine juice. 2019-2050+. **92.**

2017 Longuicher Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Carl Loewen

The 2017 Longuicher Herrenberg Kabinett from Weingut Carl Loewen is a fine young bottle in the making. The youthful nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of pink grapefruit, lemon, a lovely touch of wild yeasts, a complex base of slate and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and intensely flavored, with zesty acids, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and dancing finish. Lovely juice. 2018-2045+. **90+.**

2017 Serriger Würtzberg “Alte Kupp” Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Würtzberg

The 2017 Serriger Würtzberg “Alte Kupp” Kabinett from Weingut Würtzberg is a very good bottle in the making, but this needs a bit of bottle age to start to blossom. The nicely reserved bouquet offers up scents of grapefruit, lemon, a nice touch of saltiness, slate and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is crisp, tightly-knit and medium-full, with good nascent complexity, ripe acids and fine focus and grip on the long and classy finish. Structurally, this is certainly quite approachable, but aromatically and flavor-wise, it is still quite primary and deserves some bottle age to properly start to stir. 2022-2045. **90.**

2016 Monzinger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

This bottling hails from a parcel in the Halenberg, though the Schönleber family does not specify this on the label any longer. The 2016 Monzinger Kabinett is a lovely wine, delivering a fine bouquet of pink grapefruit, orange peel, a nice touch of wild yeasts, a fine base of slate, gentle smokiness and a dollop of the vineyard’s gentle herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and quite smoky in personality, with lovely intensity of flavor, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This too is a very good bottle in the making. 2019-2045+. **92+.**

2015 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Willi Schaefer AP #3

The Domprobst Kabinett AP #3 from Christophe Schaefer is just starting to stir and show a bit more nuance, but it remains still very early days for this lovely bottle. The youthful nose delivers a lovely mix of pear, a touch of tangerine, a fine base of slate, violets and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is very pure, medium-full and very mineral in personality, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, racy and still quite primary finish. There

is just a whisper of the vintage's succulence on the attack today, but it is a wine of very classical Kabinetten sensibilities and will be outstanding in the fullness of time. 2025-2075. **94.**

2015 Reiler Mullay-Hofberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Julius Treis

I was not familiar with the wines from Weingut Julius Treis before, as I had never tasted them prior to this Kabinett tasting at Selbach-Oster, but this 2015 version is quite tasty. The youthful bouquet offers up a lovely mix of green apple, grapefruit, a touch of smokiness, a good base of slate and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and nicely generous at the core, with good bounce and grip on the long, wide open and complex finish. This is not quite as filigreed as some Kabinetten, but that is also the style of the vintage, and the wine does have plenty going for it on both the nose and palate! 2018-2035. **91.**

2014 Veldenzer Elisenberger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter AP #10

The 2014 Veldenzer Elisenberger Kabinett AP #10 from Max Ferdinand Richter is a lovely young wine, with very classical Kabinett sensibilities and the need for further bottle age to really start hitting on all cylinders. The youthful bouquet delivers scents of quince, apple, beautiful herbal tones, a fine base of minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and nascently complex, with racy acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, filigreed and very promising finish. Just add some bottle age! 2029-2065+. **93+.**

2014 Monzinger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber

There is a touch of the exotic on both the nose and palate of the 2014 Monzinger Kabinett from the Schönleber family. The bouquet is quite expressive, offering up scents of pear, a hint of pineapple, herb tones, white flowers, a touch of honeycomb and a lovely base of slate. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and shows excellent backend mineral drive, with bright acids and fine cut and grip. I like how this wine, despite its touch of tropical fruit elements, closes with a classic Halenberg herb tones on the finish. Good juice, but not quite as classy as the 2017 and 2016 versions. 2019-2045. **91.**

2013 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Reinhold Haart AP #10

The 2013 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Kabinett AP #10 from Weingut Haart is starting to really blossom nicely at age six. The wine is 8.5 percent octane this year and offers up a lovely nose of tangerine, a touch of cassis, a lovely base of slate, citrus zest, bee pollen and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, filigreed and zesty, with fine complexity and grip, lovely balance and a long, complex and classy finish that closes with a classic Goldtröpfchen touch of currant leaf. This is really getting tasty and will be even better a decade down the road! 2019-2060. **93.**

2013 Bockenaur Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

It is interesting that Tim Fröhlich has played around with the labeling of these Kabinetten, though all of them hail from parcels in the Felseneck vineyard. His 2013 Kabinett is labeled as a *villages* bottling from Bockenau, but offers up beautiful complexity on both the nose and palate. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, salty minerality, spring flowers, still a nice touch of wild yeasts and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and complex, with zesty acids, lovely focus and filigree and a long, vibrant and classy finish. Kind of like a Coche-Dury quality of village wine! 2019-2050. **93.**

2012 Veldenzer Elisenberger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter AP #22

The 2012 Elisenberger Kabinett from Max Ferdinand Richter is another lovely and still quite youthful example of the vintage. The bouquet gently wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, a touch of quince, gentle botanicals, dried flowers and a very complex base of minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and nicely delicate in style, with lovely balance and grip, bright, zesty acids and fine lift and filigree on the long and promising finish. Lovely juice. 2023-2060. **92+**.

2012 Bernkasteler Lay Riesling Kabinett- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch

The 2012 Bernkasteler Lay Kabinett from Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch is a lovely bottle in the making. The youthful nose offers up scents of apple, pear, bee pollen, salty slate, lime zest and just a whisper of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, complex and still fairly primary, with lovely acids and grip, fine balance and a long, very well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2022-2060. **90**.

2012 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Willi Schaefer AP #3

The 2012 Domprobst Kabinett AP #3 from Weingut Schaefer is still a good four or five years away from really blossoming, but it has excellent potential and is going to be superb in the fullness of time. The bouquet is a lovely, youthful mix of pear, white cherry, salty slate minerality, bee pollen, violets and just a whisper of the heather to come in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and nascently complex, with great acids and grip, impeccable balance and a very long, focused and utterly classic finish. 2024-2075. **94**.

2012 Bockenaur Felseneck Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

The 2012 Felseneck Kabinett from Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich is outstanding. It is still a relatively young wine, but is already very, very easy to drink, wafting from the glass in a beautifully esthery blend of pear, apple, bee pollen, a gorgeously complex base of slate and an exotic hint of passion fruit in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and very transparent in personality, with lovely intensity of flavor, excellent, snappy acids, great focus and grip and a long, minerally and dancing finish. Fine, fine Kabinett. 2019-2050+. **94**.

2012 Josephshöfer Riesling Kabinett Feinherb AP #14- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt

The 2012 Josephshöfer Kabinett Feinherb from Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt is an excellent wine in the making, but it deserves at least a few more years in the cellar to fully blossom before having at it in earnest. The fine young nose wafts from the glass in a blend of yellow fruit, pear, bee pollen, slate, white flowers and the first hint of saltiness poking out in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and blossoming very nicely, with lovely intensity of flavor, bright, snappy acids and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex and zesty finish. This is going to be an outstanding bottle of Kabinett! 2022-2065. **94**.

2011 Piesporter “Schubertslay” Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Julian Haart

The 2011 Schubertslay Kabinett from Julian Haart perfectly captures the beauty of this Prädikat level, for this wine is drinking gorgeously at age eight, but still probably has another thirty to forty years of life ahead of it! The bouquet is utterly refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of white peach, salty minerality, bee pollen, a nice touch of wild yeasts, white flowers and a lovely foundation of slate. On the palate is medium-bodied, complex and marvelously transparent and filigreed, with bright acids, laser-like focus and a very long, refined and delicate finish. Just a gorgeous wine. 2018-2050. **94+**.

2011 Schiefergestein Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich

Again, this is all Felseneck fruit, but was bottled as a Schiefergestein Kabinett in the warm vintage of 2011. The wine is very pretty, but does not sport quite the same precision as some of these other vintages of Kabinetten that Tim opened during our tasting. The bouquet is pretty and nicely packed with juicy fruit tones of peach, tangerine, slate, a touch of wild yeasts, spring flowers and bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and has good mineral drive for the vintage, tangy acids and a nice closing note of citrus zest on the long and complex finish. This is very tasty. 2019-2040. **91.**

2011 Rausch Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #4

We did not have time to get to this bottle during our visit to the winery, so Dorothee and Hanno Zilliken kindly handed the wine off to us and told us to drink it before dinner at the Zeltinger Hof, once we had driven back to the middle Mosel. The wine is just starting to transition into its first stage of blossoming maturity, but is still pretty reserved and is several years away from really hitting its plateau. The bouquet offers up scents of lemon, bee pollen, a youthful touch of wild yeasts, lovely slate complications, lime zest, white flowers and a nice touch of Rausch mossiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-bodied and classically filigreed in profile, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine focus and grip, snappy acids and excellent length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. At eight years of age, this is certainly quite drinkable, but it is still rising and I would venture to leave it be in the cellar for another six to seven years before starting to think seriously about drinking it. 2025-2060. **94.**



A beautiful spring morning on a turn of the Mosel River in the town of Piesport.

2010 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Reinhold Haart AP #9

The Haart family's 2010 Goldtröpfchen Kabinett AP #9 is a fine, fine example of both the vintage and its Prädikat. The numbers on the wine are 8.5 percent octane, 9.5 grams of acidity and fifty-nine grams of sugar. The wine is truly stunning on the nose today, soaring from the glass in a blaze of pineapple, gooseberry, still a nice touch of wild yeasts, a fine base of slate that is just starting to get salty, a dollop of signature currant leaf and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and shows off lovely tension between its fruit, slate and acid components. The finish is long, filigreed, complex and marvelously zesty and energetic. With air, the first vestiges of the sweet corn to come also start to show on the nose; this is already delicious and is really going to age long and gracefully. 2019-2060. **94.**

2010 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Willi Schaefer AP #6

Not surprisingly, the 2010 Domprobst Kabinett AP #6 is still quite youthful and really deserves more time in the cellar before starting to crack bottles with expectations of generosity and resolution. The youthful bouquet shows outstanding promise however, delivering a fine blend of apple, pear, loads of slate, dried flowers, plenty of smokiness and still a touch of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, long and racy, with a great core, even better cut and grip and a very, very long, youthful finish. All this wine needs is more patience and understanding- just like the rest of us! 2026-2075. **94.**

2010 Serriger Würtzberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Würtzberg

The 2010 Serriger Würtzberg Riesling Kabinett from Weingut Würtzberg is quite tasty, offering up a youthful bouquet of grapefruit, lemon peel, a touch of wild yeasts, green apples and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-bodied and quite snappy in personality, with good focus, cut and grip and a long, still fairly primary finish. This is quite a low fat example of Kabinett, with lovely inner tension and it may well blossom into a bit more generosity, and if this occurs, my score will seem slightly conservative. 2019-2035+. **89.**

2009 Piesporter Gräfenberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Reinhold Haart AP #7

The 2009 Goldtröpfchen Kabinett from Theo Haart is a tad riper than the 2010, so this wine comes in at nine percent octane. The wine is very pretty on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a combination of fresh pineapple, cassis, slate, just the first hints of salinity, bee pollen and a topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and really quite delicate and light on its feet for this warm vintage, with sound, bouncy acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is really very good and now drinking into its plateau of peak maturity, albeit, still with decades ahead of it! 2019-2045+. **92.**

2009 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #19-14

As the last two digits of the AP number suggest, this wine was held back in the cellars at Weingut Prüm and the number was not officially given to the cuvée until 2014. In this case, it also means that the wine had an extended *elevage* in tank prior to its bottling, though probably not all the way to 2014 and most likely also spent a few years resting in bottle prior to the application for its AP number. In any case, the wine is beautiful and starting to really drink nicely at ten years of age, offering up a bright and still youthful blend of mint, heather, apple, pear, a lovely base of slate, still a whisper of wild yeasts and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and vibrant, with blossoming complexity, fine focus and grip and a long, filigreed and zesty finish that closes with a note of beeswax. Though 2009 was a hot vintage, this is a wine that is cool in profile and quite classically cut from the Kabinett mold. Fine juice. 2019-2045. **93.**

2008 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Reinhold Haart

I did not manage to catch the AP number on this beautiful bottling of Goldtröpfchen Kabinett from Theo Haart, as it was being poured at the grand opening dinner for the Mythos Mosel celebration last May, and I had to content myself with multiple pours of the wine instead! The wine is now fully blossomed at age ten and offers up a beautiful bouquet of peach, *mirabelle*, salty soil tones, a whisper of nuttiness, fruit-stone and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and nicely filigreed, with excellent complexity and grip, seamless balance, bright acids and fine focus on the long and vibrant finish. Just a lovely example. 2018-2045. **92.**

2008 Estate Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich AP #23

I very much like the 2008 Estate Riesling Kabinett from Tim Fröhlich and might have classified it a bit above “Estate” if I were the winegrower doing the labeling! The bouquet is bright, complex and quite classy, offering up scents of pear, white cherry, wild yeasts, a lovely base of slate minerality, bee pollen and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, zesty and beautifully filigreed, with a nice core, fine lightness of step, excellent focus and a long, complex and zesty finish. A lovely bottle of Kabinett that is still in climbing mode and will be even better with another five years of bottle age, but is already very tasty. 2018-2060. **92+.**

2008 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett Feinherb AP #7- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt

Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt’s 2008 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett Feinherb is a truly superb bottle. It comes in at ten percent alcohol and carries 18.6 grams of sugar. The wine is just starting to transition from young wine to more mature, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of lemon, white peach, sweet corn, a touch of beeswax, salty slate minerality and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and beautifully filigreed, with lovely focus and balance, bright acids and lovely grip and bounce on the long and very refined finish. A simply lovely example of the Scharzhofberg with decades of life still ahead of it. 2019-2055+. **94.**

2007 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #05-12

This too was given an extended *elevage* in stainless steel tank prior to its bottling and was only readied for market in 2012. 2007 was another warmer vintage, but this wine is cool, crisp and pure as well water on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a beautiful constellation of lime, pear, a touch of mossiness, just a whisper of arriving *mirabelle* with age, dried flowers, beeswax, lovely minerality and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, crisp and complex, with great focus, length and grip, impeccable balance and a long, refined and vibrant finish. A beautiful Kabinett. 2019-2045. **94.**

2007 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Willi Schaefer AP #9

Christophe Schaefer’s 2007 Himmelreich Kabinett AP #9 is really starting to blossom nicely at twelve years of age, and it is a fine time to be opening up bottles! The beautiful and very floral bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine mix of pear, white cherries, violets, slate minerality, white flowers, a touch of lilac, just a whisper of the sweet corn to come with further bottle age and a dollop of upper register saltiness that will also become far more pronounced with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is medium-full, zesty and quite filigreed, with lovely intensity of flavor, excellent complexity and grip and a very long, vibrant and perfectly balanced finish. Great Kabinett. 2019-2060. **95.**



2005 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Fritz Haag

The 2005 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Kabinett from Weingut Fritz Haag is a beautiful wine that is just starting to really drink well at age fourteen. The wine offers up a lovely aromatic constellation of pear, lemon, beeswax, salty soil tones, a hint of the sweet corn to come, spring flowers and a gently mossy topnote so typical of this *terroir*. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and vibrant, with lovely generosity on the attack, a fine core of fruit, excellent, almost flinty minerality and a very long, complex and supremely elegant finish. This is just starting to reach its plateau of maturity and has decades and decades ahead of it, but it is a great drink today. 2019-2045+. **93**.

2005 Kaseler Kehrnaple Riesling Kabinett Feinherb AP #16- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt

The 2005 Kaseler Kehrnaple Kabinett Feinherb from von Kesselstatt is a lovely example of this superb vintage, but it is a bit riper wine than the 2008 Scharzhofberger Kabinett Feinherb mentioned above- though this is just the nature of the respective vintage styles. This wine comes in at twelve percent octane and carries 17.6 grams of sugar, but still has fine Kabinett sensibilities on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a lovely blend of yellow fruit, incipient notes of sweet corn, salty minerality, gently savory notes, violets and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely generosity on the attack, a good core, fine filigree and a long, zesty and beautifully balanced finish. Fine juice that is drinking well today, but still in climbing mode. 2019-2045. **92+**.

2004 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #19

The 2004 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett AP #19 from Dr. Manfred Prüm is an gorgeous and utterly classical example of both its Prädikat level and the lovely *terroir* of this vineyard. The bouquet is just starting to blossom properly, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, pear, a touch of lime, a beautiful base of slate, a dollop of wild yeasts, white flowers and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and delicate in style, with lovely intensity of flavor, excellent mineral drive, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the filigreed and complex finish. Fine, fine juice that is just starting to hit its stride. 2019-2055+. **94.**

2003 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Egon Müller

I tasted a few 2003ers during my March trip to Germany, as winegrowers seemed delighted to show that though both summers were torrid, the style of the 2018ers was quite different from that of the 2003 vintage (which turned out better in Germany than anywhere else in Europe). This 2003 Kabinett from Egon Müller is really quite lovely and now drinking well into its apogee of peak maturity, albeit, still with decades of life ahead of it. The complex bouquet delivers scents of white cherry, pear, cress, a touch of the creaminess (that will turn to sweet corn elements with another ten years in the cellar), a fine base of slate and a topnote of lilac. On the palate the wine is pure, full, complex and very nicely mineral under its generous serving of fruit, with a lovely succulence at the core, bright acids and a long, complex and quite classy finish. This shows the signature of the vintage, but though it is not a classic Scharzhofberger Kabinett, it is a delicious wine. 2019-2040. **91.**

2002 Ockfener Bockstein Riesling Kabinett- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt

The 2002 Ockfener Bockstein Kabinett from Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt is a lovely example of this really beautiful vintage. The wine is now in transitional phase from secondary to tertiary layers of complexity and is drinking with great distinction, offering up a complex nose of wizened apples, a touch of fresh apricot, a lovely base of slate that is starting to get positively salty, dried flowers and a touch of laurel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and complex, with lovely vibrancy and cut, superb balance and a long, complex and filigreed finish. First class Kabinett with decades of life still ahead. 2019-2050. **93.**

2002 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Willi Schaefer AP #7

The 2002 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett AP #7 from Weingut Willi Schaefer is starting to really drink beautifully, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of fresh apricot, pear, salty soil tones, a touch of peach pit and a topnote of delicate floral tones. On the palate the wine is poised, medium-full and very pure and complex, with lovely lightness of step, bright, bouncy acids and a very long, complex and zesty finish. Just a classic vintage of Domprobst Kabinett, the 2002 from Willi Schaefer is drinking very well today and will continue to cruise along at its summit for many decades to come. 2019-2055+. **94.**

1999 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach AP #8

The 1999 Ürziger Würzgarten Kabinett AP #8 from the Merkelbach brothers is beautifully pure, delicate and filigreed, but it is a tad soft in the style of the vintage. The bouquet is my favorite part of the wine today, as it offers up gorgeous and still youthful complexity in its mix of apple, a touch of lime, slate, delicate floral notes of rose petal and lilacs and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, lively and refined, with lovely

focus and purity and a long, classy finish of gentle acids and striking freshness for its twenty years of age. Ultimately, though I do love the components here, it is just a tad too soft to be completely satisfying, but that is the 1999 vintage. 2019-2040. **87.**

1998 Reiler Mullay-Hofberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Julius Treis

The 1998 Reiler Mullay-Hofberg Riesling Kabinett from Weingut Julius Treis has to fall in the good, but not great camp and is not as impressive as either the 2015 or the 1975 versions. The wine is fairly shy on the nose (particularly at age twenty), reluctantly offering up scents of apple, yeasty tones and a bit of salty slate elements. On the palate the wine is a bit more expressive, with a medium-full format, solid depth and good complexity and balance on the long and zesty finish. I really do not know what to say about this wine, as it seems rather lacking in complexity on both the nose and palate, but the elements that are present are nicely done. 2018-2035? **87.**

1998 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Willi Schaefer AP #3

The 1998 vintage of Domprobst Kabinett, AP #3, has blossomed beautifully over its first two decades of life in bottle and is now hitting on all cylinders. The complex nose offers up a beautiful constellation of apple, pear, violets, sweet corn, a very complex base of slate, gentle smokiness and a lovely topnote of heather. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full classically Domprobst, with slightly broader shoulders than the Himmelreich, beautiful precision and balance, bright acids and a very, very long, complex and soil-driven finish. A great bottle of Domprobst Kabinett. 2019-2055. **94+.**

1997 Leiwener Klostersgarten Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Carl Loewen

The 1997 Leiwener Klostersgarten Riesling Kabinett from Weingut Carl Loewen is quite a nice wine, but there is a touch of mid-palate creaminess here and the relative size and shape of a lighter Spätlese, rather than a classical Kabinetten. The bouquet is certainly pretty, wafting from the glass in a mix of sweet grapefruit, a touch of pineapple, a good base of salty minerality and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and fairly generous in the mid-palate, with good complexity and grip and a long, zesty finish. Not a classic example, but a tasty wine. 2018-2035+. **90.**

1997 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Egon Müller

I do not have the AP number for this wine, as it came up from the cellars without a label. The wine is absolutely beautiful and really just starting to blossom at twenty-two years of age, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of pear, white cherry, a touch of *fleur de sel*, bee pollen, gentle mossiness, a hint of mint, a beautiful base of slate minerality, white flowers and an incipient note of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full and racy, with laser-like focus and grip, a seamless core and great cut and grip on the long, complex and still fairly youthful finish. This is still early days for this outstanding bottle of Kabinett. 2019-2055+. **94+.**

1997 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Willi Schaefer AP #15

The 1997 Himmelreich Kabinett AP #15 from the Schaefer family is a gorgeous and utterly classical example of this Prädikat. The brilliant bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of lemon peel, pear, salty minerality, just a hint of sweet corn, dried flowers and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and filigreed, with superb complexity and bounce, excellent focus, zesty acids and a very long, very refined and dancing finish. I love wines like this! 2019-2045+. **94.**

1997 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken AP #14

I had not had the pleasure to drink a bottle of the beautiful 1997 Rausch Kabinett from Hanno Zilliken since back in 2012, and the ensuing seven years of bottle age have done nothing to dissuade me that this is one of Hanno's most beautiful vintage of Kabinett from this vineyard. The wine today offers up a gorgeous bouquet of pineapple, incipient notes of sweet corn, salty soil tones, spring flowers, lime zest and a lovely whiff of Rausch botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, racy and medium-bodied, with superb intensity of flavor, marvelous filigree and mineral drive and outstanding length and grip on the impeccably balanced finish. 2019-2050. **94+**.

1996 Schloss Lieser Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Schloss Lieser

For an Estate Kabinett, this is really quite lovely on both the nose and palate. At age twenty-three the wine is fully into its apogee, offering up a complex nose of peach, fresh lime, salty slate minerality, sweet core and a touch of upper register buttercups. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and complex, with lovely focus and grip, fine backend mineral drive, bright, zesty acids and a long, complex and very classy finish. Fine juice. 2019-2045+. **92**.

1994 Oberhäuser Leistenberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Dönnhoff AP #11

The 1994 Leistenberg Kabinett from Helmut Dönnhoff is now drinking beautifully and is fully into its plateau of peak maturity. The gorgeous nose offers up a beautifully evolved and complex blend of baked apple, gentle saltiness, citrus peel, complex soil tones, discreet smokiness and a lovely topnote of laurel. On the palate the wine is pure, complex and medium-bodied, with exceptional balance and cut, excellent delicacy of step and a long, filigreed and bouncy finish. Just a lovely bottle. 2019-2045. **93**.

1994 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Kabinett- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch AP #3

The 1994 Doctor Kabinett is simply outstanding and at the peak of its powers at age twenty-five. The beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of white peach, a touch of *mirabelle*, heather, complex soil tones, a hint of mossiness and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full, pure and complex, with superb cut and grip, outstanding focus and a very long, poised and perfectly balanced finish. This is a great, great vintage of Doctor Kabinett that is still climbing up to its full peak, but is drinking with great style as it continues its ascent. Gorgeous and nearly timeless. 2019-2060+. **95**.

1992 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm AP #01 94

The 1992 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett from Manfred Prüm is a tasty wine, but it is a bit soft structurally to my palate and this keeps the score down just a bit. The bouquet is still lovely and transitioning very nicely into its secondary stage of development, offering up scents of pear, a wisp of pineapple, a fine base of slate, dried flowers, sweet corn and a topnote of vanilla bean. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and focused, with lovely intensity of flavor, with fine grip and complexity, gently framing acids, but good length on the classy finish. Other than the fairly low acidity for a Manfred Prüm Kabinett, everything else here is quite lovely, and despite its moderate acidity, the wine still will probably age still for several decades. 2019-2040+. **91**.



1990 Oberhäuser Leistenberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Dönnhoff

Helmut Dönnhoff noted while we were drinking the 1994 and 1990 Leistenberg Kabinetten during my recent visit to the estate that the “slate here in the Leistenberg is more like the style of slate that one finds in the Saar.” The 1990 Leistenberg Kabinett is at its apogee as well and really drinking brilliantly today, offering up a complex and nicely tertiary bouquet of pear, quince, beeswax, salty slate minerality, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, delicate and gorgeously transparent, with superb intensity of flavor, virtual weightlessness and a very long, vibrant and zesty finish of impressive complexity and grip. First class Kabinett. 2019-2060. **94.**

1990 Zeltinger Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken- Weingut Selbach-Oster

The Selbach family’s 1990 Zeltinger Himmelreich Halbtrocken Kabinett was really showing beautifully last May. The bouquet is pure and has developed superb complexity, delivering a fine constellation of lemon, tart pear, salty soil tones, gentle notes of beeswax and the first touch of the sweet corn of tertiary maturity. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, vibrant and beautifully filigreed, with fine intensity of flavor, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and seamlessly balanced finish. Fine, fine juice! 2018-2040. **92.**

1990 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Selbach-Oster

The 1990 Zeltinger Schlossberg Kabinett from Johannes Selbach is quite lovely. The bouquet offers up a complex and beautifully wide open blend of pear, salty slate soil, a touch of dried flowers, citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and

complex, with fine focus, cut and grip. This is quite a dry style of Riesling and clearly harkens back to an older era of climate in the middle Mosel, but the wine has lovely inner tension and impressive length and complexity. Fine juice. 2018-2045. **91.**

1989 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Egon Müller

The 1989 Scharzhofberger Kabinett from Egon Müller is absolutely brilliant and at its peak of drinkability today. The refined and utterly vibrant bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of pear, white cherry, lovely mossiness, beeswax, sea salts, a beautiful foundation of slate and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, refined, fullish and *à point*, with a lovely core, great breed and vibrancy, zesty acids and a very long, very complex and now quite dry finish. A gorgeous bottle of Egon Kabinett. 2019-2060. **95.**

1989 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett AP #76- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt

Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt's 1989 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett is a gorgeous example of this vintage and is really drinking superbly well today. The classic nose delivers precision and unharnessed beauty in its blend of candied lemon, quince, salty minerality, a lovely, esthery touch of bee pollen, sweet corn and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crystal clear and filigreed, with excellent intensity of flavor, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and complex finish. Gorgeous juice. 2019-2050. **94.**

1988 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett AP #38- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt

Perhaps my favorite German vintage for current mature drinking is 1988, and this Goldtröpfchen Kabinett from von Kesselstatt is a perfect example of just how superb this vintage is today. The beautifully complex and resolved nose wafts from the glass in a vibrant mix of white peach, sweet corn, salty minerality, gentle smokiness and a topnote of corn flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied, complex and filigreed, with lovely tug between soil, acids and mature and succulent fruit tones. The finish is long, superbly focused and simply dancing today! Really lovely mature Kabinett! 2019-2045. **93.**

1988 Graacher Josephshöfer Riesling Kabinett AP #83- Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt

I have not traditionally drunk many examples of the Josephshöfer vineyard, but I fully intend to remedy this in the years to come! The 1988 Kabinett from this great vineyard in Graach is breathtakingly beautiful today, delivering a brilliant aromatic constellation of pear, sweet corn, a superbly complex base of salty minerality, lilacs and a hint of butter in the upper register. On the palate the wine is very pure, medium-full, long and vibrant, with superb complexity and focus, lovely filigree and a very, very long, pure and energetic finish. This is a simply brilliant bottle of Kabinett at its absolute zenith, and yet still with decades of life ahead of it! 2019-2050. **95.**

1986 Zeltinger Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Selbach-Oster

The big of harvest time rain in 1986 is evident here in this wine, which does not have quite the same cut and grip of many of these other, older Selbach Kabinetten, but the wine is still quite pretty and complex on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a fully mature constellation of pear, apple, sweet corn, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and nicely filigreed, with a lovely core and complexity, good balance and a long, focused finish. There is not a ton of acid bounce here on the backend,

but the wine's lovely balance will probably allow it to continue to cruise along nicely in bottle for many more years to come. 2018-2035+. **89.**

1986 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch

I really love the old bottlings of Juffer-Sonnenuhr from the Thanisch family and it is too bad that this parcel of vines is no longer part of the estate's vineyard patrimony. This brilliant 1986 Kabinett was the only one bottled from this site and is AP #20 for those keeping score at home. The bouquet is stunning, delivering a gorgeous constellation of pear, a hint of sweet corn, beautiful herbal tones, salty soil elements layered over a fine base of slate. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and very complex, with lovely focus and grip, still excellent acidity and a very long, very pure and beautifully balanced finish. A great and utterly classical Kabinett from this great *terroir*. 2019-2050+. **95.**

1986 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken- Vereinigte Hospitien AP #37

The 1986 vintage produced a lot of superb Kabinetten and this Badstube Halbtrocken version from the Vereinigte Hospitien was absolutely fabulous. The bouquet is pure, complex and beautifully tertiary now in profile, offering up a vibrant blend of orange, fresh apricot, a hint of pineapple. Leather, salty soil tones and a touch of heather and clover in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and filigreed, with great complexity and focus, very good acids and a lovely bounce and grip on the long, refined and dancing finish. Great juice with decades of life still ahead of it! 2019-2045+. **94.**

1986 Wiltinger Kupp Riesling Kabinett- Vereinigte Hospitien AP #61

I am planning to drink another bottle of this when I get back to the Zeltinger Hof, if they still have one on the list (and I am probably the only client of late who has been probing their selection of 1986 Kabinetten!), as the fill here was just a touch lower than the other 1986ers that I had from the Vereinigte Hospitien during my visits to the wine list here in March. Perhaps the slightly lower fill produced a more forward bottle, but the '86 Wiltinger Kupp Kabinett was not quite as fresh as the other '86s I drank from the estate, offering up a pretty and quite tertiary bouquet of orange peel, apricot, salty minerality, a nice touch of sweet corn and smoky overtones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and fully resolved, with still quite good acidity and focus, but starting to show just a touch of structural fragility on the long and complex finish. Perhaps there are better bottles still down in the cellar? 2019-2025? **88?**

1985 Trierer Angenschneider Riesling Kabinett- Vereinigte Hospitien AP #25

The Vereinigte Hospitien owns an amazing array of vineyards (including the entirety of the Schubertslay in Piesport now partially farmed by Klaus-Peter Keller) and back in the decade of the 1980s (and earlier) this was one of Mosel's top estates. This bottling of 1985 Kabinett is still drinking at its apogee, but as this was one of the warmer vintages of the decade, it is a bit more along its evolutionary arc than the two 1986ers reported on just above. The fully mature nose is complex and nicely salty today, offering up a lovely nose of peach, fresh apricot, a touch of orange peel, salty soil tones and a hint of the tea leaves to come with further aging. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-bodied and complex, with fine focus and grip, good balance and still quite nice framing acids to continue to carry this wine on into the immediate future. Good juice. 2019-2035+? **91.**

1985 Saarburger Rausch Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken

I do not have the AP number for this example of 1985 Rausch Kabinett, as it came up from the Zilliken family cellars and did not have a label. But, I can at least vouch for its absolute brilliance! Having had a bottle of the AP #10 Rausch Kabinett here three or four years ago, I

would guess that this is the same wine, but an even better example than the last one that I tried. The wine is a classic, pre-global warming Saar Kabinett, with its forty grams per liter of residual sugar buried in minerality and its 9.2 grams per liter of acidity. This is a beautiful bottle of Kabinett at its peak of maturity at age thirty-four, jumping from the glass in a superb aromatic blend of lemon, lovely herbal tones, beeswax, sweet corn, salty soil tones and a nice touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and salty, with seamless balance, bright acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and dancing finish. Superb wine. 2019-2040. **94.**



1983 Zeltinger Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Selbach-Oster

The 1983 Zeltinger Himmelreich Kabinett from Weingut Selbach-Oster is really a beautiful bottle of old school, classical Kabinett at its apogee. The nose is pure and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of yellow fruit, beautifully salty minerality, a touch of beeswax, pear and a topnote of bitter almond. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp, complex and filigreed, with lovely balance and grip, still very respectable acidity and a long, focused finish. This is really pretty and still has decades of life ahead of it. 2018-2045+. **92.**

1982 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 1982 vintage was a good, solid vintage, but it has long had to live in the shadow of the 1983ers, but I remember drinking some nice wines from this vintage in my very early days in

the wine trade. Today, this example of Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett is drinking at its apogee and is truly lovely, wafting from the glass in a very complex blend of pear, gentle mossiness, beeswax, white flowers, a touch of violet, a lovely base of slate minerality and an exotic hint of licorice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, suave and beautifully complex, with impeccable focus and balance, sound framing acids and lovely length and grip on the elegant and very pure finish. This wine was stored without an original label, so I do not know what its AP number might have been. A gorgeous bottle at its apogee, but still with decades of life ahead of it! 2019-2040. **94.**

1975 Reiler Sorrentberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Julius Treis

The 1975 Reiler Sorrentberg Kabinett from Weingut Julius Treis is truly outstanding and is drinking gorgeously at age forty-three. The complex and nicely tertiary bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pineapple, a touch of *mirabelle*, salty soil tones, candied lemon peel, gentle smokiness and a topnote of sweet corn. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and perfectly resolved, with lovely filigree and intensity of flavor, still a good core and impeccable focus and balance on the long, complex and vibrant finish. There remains really good backend lift here and this wine still has many miles to go. Quite a treat! 2018-2040. **93.**

CHAMPAGNE JACQUES SELOSSE CRAFTING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN THE HEART OF AVIZE



Anselme Selosse holding court in his cellars in Avize. (photo courtesy of Blake and Kathleen Murdock).

Champagne had been in the midst of a quality revolution for the last fifteen years that is absolutely unprecedented in its history, and one of the principal architects of its surge upwards to its current level of excellence has been Anselme Selosse. Over the course of his long career, Monsieur Selosse has been a bit of a galvanizing figure in the firmament of Champagne, as he is looked up to reverentially by many of the very finest young *vignerons* in the region and some of today's brightest stars, such as Alexandre Chartogne, Aurélien Suenen and the like cite Anselme Selosse as their primary inspiration. However, not everyone in the region has been enamored of some the changes that Monsieur Selosse has helped usher into Champagne during the course of his long career. I have little doubt that there are still some important figures to be found amongst the *Grandes Marques* that would have been perfectly content if Anselme Selosse had never come along and Champagne could have continued on with the system that shaped the region for the century prior to Monsieur Selosse taking over his family's estate in the grand cru village of Avize in the *Côte de Blancs* in 1980. However, as the years have gone by, the detractors of Monsieur Selosse have continued to diminish in numbers and his supporters have become a large, vast majority. In the long run, history will ultimately come to the conclusion that Anselme Selosse has occupied one of the most important historical roles in the region in the last half century, as he has almost singlehandedly been the architect of the "cultural revolution" that has swept through the vineyards of the Champagne region. At the end of the day, his place in history

of Champagne will ultimately reside at the same level as that of Henri Mayer in Burgundy, as a *vigneron* with vision for a better future for his region and the passion, talent and energy to make it happen in his lifetime.

This article has long been in the preparatory stage, as I wanted to spend a few more times tasting and chatting with Monsieur Seloisse in his cellars in Avize prior to writing of his historical legacy in Champagne; I have previously only had the pleasure to do visit and taste here on one occasion. However, as readers may recall, my 2018 spring trip to the region was cut short by a brutal bout of the flu and all I could do on that visit was say a quick *bonjour* to Monsieur Seloisse in the lobby of his small and very comfortable hotel in Avize, while trying not to spread my germs around and give anyone else the flu! I had been scheduled on that trip for a full morning of tasting and talking there with Anselme, but had arrived the afternoon before in such a sorry state of health that all I could do was crawl out of my bed for an hour around dinner time and try to eat a little something before laying down again and hoping to survive the flu. It was very clear that I was going to be in no shape for my appointment with the *maestro* the next morning and had already relayed this information to the hotel staff the night before. I had arrived with a full list of questions I wished to discuss with Monsieur Seloisse about his winemaking and farming philosophies, the evolution of his relatively new range of single vineyard bottlings (and an attendant tasting of the single vineyards was indeed on tap) and how he viewed the current landscape of Champagne, but all of that was superseded by the need to try and get home and weather the flu as best I could back in New York. Anselme Seloisse was very compassionate of my condition and handed me off a bottle of his Sous Le Mont *lieu à dit* cuvée (from a parcel of vines just above Clos des Goisses in the village of Mareuil-sur-Aÿ) and wished me all the best on my return to New York. I left the bottle in a friend's cellar in Beaune on my way back to Geneva for my return flight and was able to drink it with immense pleasure on my next trip to Burgundy.

However, as many readers have been asking me for quite some time when this article was finally going to find its way into the pages of the newsletter, I decided to not wait for my next spring trip to Champagne and just go ahead and write it now. It would have been better with another extended interview with Monsieur Seloisse, of that I am certain, but as the domaine is now in the transition from one generation to the next, with Anselme passing on the reins of the winery to his son, Guillaume (the official passing of the baton is set for January of 2019, though Guillaume Seloisse has effectively been making the wines here for a few years already), it seemed that the timing was good to finally finish up this feature on the man who has changed so much in Champagne during the course of his career. I had been thrilled to finally have the opportunity to visit the cellars of Anselme Seloisse for the first time back in the spring of 2014 in Avize, and I learned much on that visit and, as the ensuing years have flowed past, I have become increasingly aware of just how much influence and inspiration Anselme has generated for the up and coming generation of young *vignerons* in the region, so I deemed it inappropriate to keep this report on hold any longer. As I have mentioned in the past, today, Champagne is perhaps the most dynamic and positively-changing major wine region in the world, and it is not a stretch to say that it is quite possible that little of this innovation and changed philosophies might ever have taken place if Anselme Seloisse had not returned to take over his father's domaine in Avize from his *stages* in Burgundy in 1980 as a man with a mission.

Anselme Selosse originally studied Oenology in Beaune, rather than in Reims, as he really wanted to do “something different” as a student and much of his ensuing philosophy that was to inform his work over the coming three-plus decades was forged there in the center of the Côte d’Or. He completed his studies in 1974 and returned to work alongside of his father, but interspersed his time in Avize with *stages* at a couple of domaines back in Burgundy. He spent much time during the last couple of years of the 1970s working with some of the most talented and visionary producers in the Côte d’Or, with his *stage* at Domaine Leflaive in Puligny-Montrachet probably having the most impact on how Anselme thought about his own personal approach to wine. When Monsieur Selosse is asked about his apprenticeships in Burgundy, he recounts very fondly his time working with Anne-Claude Leflaive and there is little doubt that this was a seminal moment in the shaping of his winemaking and viticultural philosophies. He also worked alongside of a young Jean-François Coche at Domaine Coche-Dury, picking up plenty of insights there as well, before returning home for good, and during his time in Burgundy he became very dissatisfied with the negligible role that *terroir* played in almost all of the wines at the time in his native Champagne. He vowed that when he got back home and took over direction of the family domaine things would change in several regards.

When a young Anselme Selosse completely took over the direction of his father’s domaine in Avize in 1980, he was intent on changing the then-standard operating procedure in the vineyards and cellars of Champagne, adopting far more of a “Burgundian” model for his family’s vineyards and his approach to winemaking. One could say that prior to the changes ushered in by Anselme, most of Champagne was made on what I might term a *Bordelais* model (Monsieur Selosse himself calls this an “Anglo-Saxon” model), with emphasis on brand building, blending and crafting as consistent a product as possible from year to year. Vintage variations were to be downplayed as much as possible, the concept of the primacy of *terroir* and its expression in the wines was almost anathema to many of the top producers in Champagne, and farming practices in the region were not particularly healthy at this time. However, it is important to understand that the decades of the 1960s and 1970s in Champagne are hardly a mirror image of what passes for normalcy today in the region, as times were far, far less economically comfortable for the vast majority of the *vignerons* of Champagne in this era, and the dire economic and socio-political upheavals brought about by the first and second world wars and their dismal aftermaths were hardly the stuff of ancient legend at that time. Keep in mind that, even today, land ownership in Champagne is actually more fragmented than is the case in Burgundy, with most of the producers here very small landowners who farm their parcels during the growing season and then sell off their production to the large Champagne houses, and this dependence on the *Grandes Marques* to buy the grapes and actually make the wines was far more pronounced in those days than it is at the present time. Extreme hardship in the Champagne region was only a few years back in the rearview mirror and those terrible times still cast a shadow on peoples’ outlooks in the region when Anselme Selosse was coming of age and honing his craft in the latter half of the 1970s at some of these great white Burgundy domaines and aspiring for something of a similar insight and spiritual genesis to his Burgundy experiences for his family’s property in Avize.

It is perhaps useful to revisit the Champagne of Anselme Selosse’s formative years, just to set a proper context for what was to unfold over the length of his career once he returned to Champagne. One has to understand just how different vineyard work was in the region in this

era, as the traditions that had come about in the hardscrabble post-war years in France continued to hold sway in the *vignobles* of Champagne right through the 1970s, even though economic prospects had begun to brighten considerably towards the end of the quarter century since World War II had ground to a halt. One of the most egregious aspects of viticultural practices in Champagne at this time had grown out of the absolute poverty of the post-war period, exemplified by how the *Champenois* had agreed to take deliveries of garbage from Paris to use as fertilizer in their vineyards in the early post-war years. Back in the late 1940s, of course, this would have mostly been compostable materials and probably beneficial, but by the 1970s, the amount of glass, plastic and other non-biodegradable materials in the garbage coming from Paris had grown exponentially and the madness of dumping this stuff on the vineyards in Champagne was self-evident to any who bothered to take a closer look. And yet, the tradition continued unabated. Yields in the vineyards were extremely high in this era, and this practice has persisted in many vineyards up until the present day. Petrochemical treatments were also extremely widespread in their use in the vines at this time, as was the case throughout much of Europe in the 1970s. Upon his assuming control of the family estate in Avize in 1980, Anselme Selosse immediately transformed the viticultural methods practiced in his family's vineyard parcels to reduce yields and do away with chemical treatments in the vines, and he was one of the driving forces in those early days of his career in introducing sustainable and organic viticulture in a region where the widespread use of chemicals in the vines was rampant (and which sadly continues on in many vineyards down to the present day). Monsieur Selosse's influence cannot be overstated when it comes to rationalizing and naturalizing vineyard husbandry in Champagne and inspiring many of the younger generation of *vignerons* to follow in his footsteps and move to a far more sustainable and organic style of farming.

Anselme Selosse's father, Jacques Selosse, had first started putting together what would become his family domaine when he bought his first parcel of vines in Avize back in 1947. As is discussed above, Champagne in the immediate aftermath of the second world war was not the Champagne that we know today, and though much of the heaviest fighting of the war had not occurred directly in the region of Champagne (unlike the first world war), the scars left behind by the second war were hardly healed. However, at least vineyard land was not so expensive back then (though nobody really had much money either), so Jacques Selosse was able to start buying very good vineyards in what would become the grand cru villages of Avize, Cramant and Oger as he started to piece together his family domaine. Many of the vineyard parcels that Jacques Selosse bought in the late 1940s had been planted in the immediate aftermath of the fighting in the region during the first world war; consequently, the oldest vines today owned by the family were planted in 1922. For the better part of the first two decades of his career, Jacques Selosse was content to sell off the production of his vineyards to the *Grandes Marques*, as was the case with nearly all of the growers in Champagne in this era. However, by 1964 he was inspired to start making a bit of his own wine, and his first year producing domaine-bottled Champagne was in this *grande année*- certainly a propitious vintage with which to start making wines! Jacques Selosse produced only twenty-five hundred bottles in his first vintage, while continuing to sell off the rest of his grape production to the large Champagne houses, with Lanson being his biggest customer. By the time Anselme was ready to take over the reins of the family estate, the Selosse vineyard patrimony extended to nearly seven hectares of vines and his father was producing and selling twelve thousand bottles of his own wines each year. Today, the

estate's vineyard patrimony is just a bit larger than this, totaling 8.3 hectares, with some pinot noir parcels having added one hectare in the villages of Ambonnay, Mareuil-sur-Aÿ and Aÿ.

The majority of the Selosse family's vineyards lie in their home village of Avize. Of the 7.3 hectares of chardonnay vines that they farm in the Côte des Blancs, with their non-Avize parcels spread out into the neighboring, top flight grand crus of Cramant, Oger and Mesnil-sur-Oger, one of the rather remarkable aspects of the family's vineyards is the age of their vines. As I noted, their oldest vines were planted in 1922, right after the First World War, and both Anselme and his father Jacques before him, valued greatly the age of their vines, so these oldest vines were never replanted. This is extremely rare in Champagne, where volume of production is often cherished more than in some other regions and thus replanting to younger, more vigorous vines is not an infrequent occurrence. This same mindset is often seen in both Bordeaux and many parts of California, where vineyards are often replanted once the vines get to twenty or twenty-five years of age, as the potential yields start to fall off markedly from this point onwards. However, the Selosse parcels today in the Côte des Blancs average fifty-five years of age, which is yet another manifestation of the more Burgundian mindset with which Anselme Selosse returned to Avize from Beaune back in the 1970s. One can see this respect that the family has for old vines in their brochure that they give to guests at their hotel, les Avizés, with a sketch (presumably done by Anselme) of the intricate root system one finds below old vines and the observation that "the wine finds its spirit in its sap" brought about by the mineral expression these *vieilles vignes* contribute to the wine.

Interestingly, while Anselme Selosse was one of the very first practitioners of organic farming methods in his vineyards in Champagne (with Vincent Laval's parents in Cumières also changing their viticultural approach around the same time), Monsieur Selosse has never sought to have his farming methods certified by any of the institutions that codify organic or biodynamic farming practices, such as Ecocert. With Burgundy fresh in his mind, he moved right from the outset of his taking over the family vines to lower yields, eschew chemical treatments and start to harvest riper fruit with which to make his wines. The prevailing wisdom at the time was that Champagne was best produced from high yields, which spread out the natural vigor of the vines and hence retarded the ripening of the larger number of bunches, allowing for higher acidity and lower potential alcohol in the wines. In fact, in many of the vineyards of Champagne, this practice continues, with the CIVC, the regional governing organization for Champagne, not setting limits on yields until midsummer of each growing season, and basing the maximum allowable yields on the perceived need of the marketplace two or three years down the road for X number of millions of bottles of Champagne to keep a steady flow of bubbly stretching out to the four corners of the globe, without overproducing and driving down prices. Coldly logical on one hand, this system is pure madness in terms of harnessing quality in the vineyards, and the result of this practice is that one can walk through vineyard after vineyard in Champagne just after harvest time and see significant portions of top vineyards that have gone completely unpicked, as the potential yields were so vast prior to the declaration of accepted max yields for a given growing season, that huge swaths of vines are just left with the bunches hanging for the birds to devour. Hardly a system that is going to produce great fruit or wines that speak of their underlying *terroir*!



However, while Anselme Selosse immediately opted for a different path for his farming, moving to a much more organically-based system of viticulture and chucking out petro-chemical products from his husbandry regime, he has been careful over the years to steer clear of what he perceives of as any dogmatic approaches to farming. From his early organic viticulture, he dabbled in certified organic farming when it first really began to be popular in the 1990s (or what he calls “agro-biology”), and then moved on to experimenting with the precepts of biodynamic farming from 1996 to 2002. Anselme eventually chose to shift away from biodynamic farming and not apply biodynamics systematically to his vineyards, but rather to adopt certain practices that worked well for him, above all desiring to retain the flexibility to adapt his farming to the needs and exigencies of any given growing season. It is a philosophical approach to the vineyards that is shared by his son Guillaume, who has been working side by side with his father since 2012 and is now in the midst of taking over the family estate. But, the Selosse vineyards have plenty of ground cover growing in them, Anselme and Guillaume prepare their own blend

of organic compost and pay attention the cycles of the moon, so their methods are clearly more organic than many of their neighbors in Champagne. Monsieur Selosse's evolving philosophy of viticulture is one of respecting, observing and nurturing nature, but not harnessing it, with his oft-cited inspiration these days being the naturally-balanced ecosystem of a forest.

In addition to changing wholesale the approach to farming of his father, Anselme Selosse also moved to transform winemaking practices at the family domaine right from the outset. He changed Jacques' methods in the cellars upon his return from his various *stages* in Burgundy, as he began to barrel-ferment all of his *vins clairs* on a parcel by parcel basis (his father had practiced the traditions of his generation, making one or two large cuvées of blended vineyards and fermenting in stainless steel tanks), using solely indigenous yeasts for the fermentations and really began to champion the notion of *terroir* in his Champagnes. This was downright revolutionary at the time, as one must remember that the prestige of Champagne had been firmly based on the superior blending skills of the finest winemakers and *maisons* in the region, and this philosophy can be traced directly back to the pioneering work of Dom Pérignon himself, centuries and centuries before. In 1980, the consensus in Champagne was that any wine made from a very well-executed blend by a top winemaker was, by definition, superior to a wine made exclusively from a single vineyard. Remember, at this time, the debut vintage of Krug's Clos du Mesnil was only from the 1979 growing season and was still a very well-kept secret quietly aging on its fine lees in their cellars in Reims, as it would not be until 1989 that the wine was to be unveiled to the world. To be sure, there were already a few great single vineyard Champagnes produced in the region, led by Champagne Philipponnat's flagship Clos des Goisses bottling from this superb vineyard in Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, but these were the exceptions that proved the rule in the minds of most of the *Champenois*. In the prevailing wisdom of Champagne in 1980, blended wines were simply better than single vineyard wines, and there were very, very few people who questioned this premise.

It was not only Anselme Selosse's approach in the cellar that went against the grain of Champagne in those early days once he was in charge of the estate, seeking to vinify each of his *lieux à dits* separately (a practice that continues to this day, with presently fifty-four different parcels initially vinified on their own), but also his insistence on using Burgundian casks for his initial vinification of the *vins clairs*. Monsieur Selosse bought his initial barrels both as new casks from tonneliers in Burgundy and used ones from Domaine Leflaive, which was certainly a pretty good source for used barrels! Right from outset, he also began working with decidedly riper fruit than his neighbors, as he had cut back his yields quite dramatically by Champagne standards once he was the head of the domaine and also began picking later than his neighbors, so as to have better physiological maturity in his grapes. However, it should be noted that though he was picking fruit a bit later than his neighbors, he was generally not letting his *vins clairs* go through malolactic fermentation, so any possible diminution in acidity levels from riper grapes was offset by the lack of malo. The first vintage where he had primary responsibility for vinifying the fruit at his family domaine was 1974 (after finishing up his initial studies in Beaune), but he cites the pivotal year of 1976, which was an extreme drought vintage in Champagne, as the year when everything began to change for him. Prior to this, he worked much as his father had done before him in the cellars, blending the different parcels for initial fermentations, fermenting primarily in stainless steel tanks, and adding a set amount of sugar for the secondary fermentation in bottle to produce a set number of atmospheres of pressure in the

finished bubbly. However, he had extremely ripe grapes because of the drought in 1976 and told himself that he was going to need less pressure in the finished wines as a result and consequently, Anselme dramatically reduced the amount of sugar he added for the secondary fermentation in bottle. The results delighted him and he has said that in this vintage “I discovered freedom” as a winemaker.

While his subsequent *stages* in Burgundy in the late 1970s were to further shape his philosophy for both the vineyards and cellars, a visit he made to Rioja during his student days was also to serve as a foundation for another fundamental principal that would come to inform his winemaking and cellaring practices, and that was the sophisticated approach to aging in cask that he discovered in Rioja. By his own account, his epiphany in this regard came during an extended visit to López de Heredia in Haro in 1972, where he was able to really see how the family approached long aging of their wines in barrel. This would eventually evolve into his approach for both how he aged his *vins clairs* and how he handled his reserve wines. As far as the aging of the *vins clairs* goes, Anselme began almost immediately to extend the *elevage* of his still wines prior to their being bottled up for their secondary fermentations. In much of Champagne, the blending trials for the *vins clairs* are generally set for early in the new year following the harvest, with an eye towards settling on the constituent components of a given cuvée in time to blend and bottle by March or April for the secondary fermentation. Anselme extended out his *elevage* of his *vins clairs* to a period of eight to twelve months, before even starting to think about bottling for secondary fermentation, and this was another quite revolutionary concept at the time that he began this practice in the early 1980s. Many of his earlier wines had a bit more of a new oaky personality than what one will find today in a bottle of Champagne Jacques Selosse, as he needed casks at the outset and he certainly needed to buy new barrels in addition to what used casks he could source from Domaine Leflaive. I have to imagine that after working at both Domaines Leflaive and Coche-Dury, Anselme was also curious how the aromas and flavors of new oak might work in Champagne. The taste of new oak was something almost completely alien to the wines of the region in the early 1980s, and Monsieur Selosse was certainly criticized in this regard from several quarters early on, as several of his first wines were quite marked by the aromas and flavors of new oak. In his formative years at the helm, he was not above even further experimentation than just utilizing a percentage of new Burgundy barrels, as I still vividly recall a bottling he produced exclusively in used Sherry casks back in the early 1990s. Novel it was.

But, as Anselme Selosse has said from time to time over the last ten or fifteen years of his career, he was certainly not averse to pushing limits in both his viticulture and cellar work in his early years, and, as he will admit, some of his experiments in that first decade or so were not as successful as others. He has often been quoted in more recent times of saying that he had now entered his “adult phase as a winegrower”, having experimented with picking dates and levels of ripeness in his vineyards early on, perhaps picking some parcels too late and with more sugar than ended up being ideal, or harvesting at too low yields and subsequently getting too much concentration in the resulting wines. Similarly, in the cellars, he has at times worked with significantly more new oak for some of his *vins clairs* than he does today, reaching out to see what percentages work best in Champagne and ultimately settling for much lower percentages of new oak for his *vins clairs* in the last ten or fifteen years. His use of SO₂ during the *elevage* and bottling has also been played with over the years, and he will intimate that there was probably a

time earlier in his career when he went too low in his use of sulfur for the wines and they consequently aged at a brisker pace than what he would find ideal. A lot of his experimentation in these regards stem from his historical timeframe that we touched upon above, searching for ways to farm better and make better wines than what was the standard operating procedure in Champagne in his formative years. I have to think that some of his persistent critics today had more experience with some of his earlier experimental wines than they do with what he has been crafting in his cellars in Avize in the last fifteen years, or with what his son Guillaume is now producing here, as the official generational transfer of the domaine is set to take place early next year and for all practical purposes, Guillaume Selosse is the winemaker at Champagne Jacques Selosse already.

In his early years, Anselme Selosse's new styles of wines did not garner immediate cachet in the world of Champagne, but it did not take too long for the *cavistes* and *sommeliers* of Paris to take note of what was going on at this domaine and he eventually started to gain quite a following for his wines within the French capital. Another very important supporter of Monsieur Selosse in those earliest years was his Italian importer, who from the outset recognized the potential of the Selosse wines with the changes that were being incorporated at the family domaine, and consequently, other than within France, the Champagne Selosse wines are most widely available in Italy these days. Today's production from domaine Selosse sees forty percent go to Italy, thirty percent is sold in France, and the remainder of the world splits up the remaining thirty percent. International acclaim was still many years away in the 1980s, but Monsieur Selosse's philosophy was certainly not falling on deaf ears, particularly to those in who might be aware with how much of Champagne was being made by rather industrial methods at this same time. The few off the wall wines such as the one raised in old Sherry casks were hardly the defining wines of Anselme Selosse's first decade at the helm at his estate, but his most successful wines were still a dramatic step away from the prevailing style paradigm in Champagne. With their extended *elevage* in Burgundy casks, their riper grapes to start with, and the emphasis on letting the underlying *terroir* shine through, these were often weightier and slightly more oxidative wines out of the blocks than the wines that many Champagne lovers were accustomed to, and they also varied stylistically from year to year to reflect the underlying style of their given growing season. At this time, they also often still tasted of their new oak, though percentages of new wood used during the *elevage* were not particularly high after the first few years. But, these were his growing years and the wines would vary quite a bit depending on what facet he might be experimenting with at the time. And of course, Monsieur Selosse was certainly making no efforts to create a consistent Champagne from year to year in those early days (as his philosophy at that time was that each year should have its own personality that reflected the underlying growing season- above and beyond any experiments he might be conducting), and his marked departure from the stylistic norm of "consistency" in Champagne earned him some vocal detractors in that first decade or so, to go along with his growing cadre of serious fans!

I mentioned above that, although Anselme's *stages* in Puligny and Meursault are often cited as the moments when his philosophy was forged for how much better Champagne could be with revised farming practices and an emphasis on *terroir*, his visit to Rioja back in 1972 also provided a very important experience that he has drawn upon as his career has blossomed. It was here that he first began to really contemplate what could be done back in Avize when it came to extended aging in barrel, as was the prevailing style in the great *bodegas* of Rioja at the time. He

would subsequently visit Sherry and start to think in terms of how a solera system also might be incorporated into his aging regimen. As the decade of the 1980s unfolded back at the Seloisse estate, barrel-fermenting and aging the *vins clairs* in cask was not the only use that the smaller barrels were being put to by Monsieur Seloisse, as he also decided to try aging his reserve wines in barrel, rather than in stainless steel tank, as most other Champagne producers will do. Over time his philosophy evolved a bit in this regard, moving to larger containers for his reserve wines and in 1986, he started a solera system for his reserve wines that eventually came to be the base of not only the reserve wines, but also the principal vehicle for one of his most famous bottlings, his Cuvée Substance. With this bottling, he adds in production from the new vintage's *vins clairs* to his perpetual solera of reserves after drawing off the volume that is to be bottled for the next release, so that it is constantly refreshed with the new vintage, but retains much of its character and complexity from the older wines still in the solera. However, the new *vins clairs* that go into his Cuvée Substance solera have already spent a full year aging in small barrels prior to their being incorporated into the reserve wines here.



As his career has gone along, he has adopted variations of this approach for all of his reserve wines, so that several other bottlings now have their own solera dedicated to them, with the new wine from the same parcels go into the reserve wines each year and each wine can start to have its own particular lot of reserve wines dedicated to their same specific *terroirs* year after year. With all of Anselme Seloisse's *vins clairs*, they will start off spending anywhere from ten to

twelve months in barrel prior to the next phase in the winemaking process. At this point, some will become the base year wines for his various blended cuvées, while others will be designated as reserve wines. I do not know for certain if Monsieur Seloisse started out aging some of his reserve wines for longer periods of time in barrels back in the early days (though I would guess that this was the case), but today, at the one year mark, the *vins clairs* that are designated either to become reserve wines or are to go into the large solera for Cuvée Substance are racked out of their barrels and aged in large, epoxy-lined cement tanks, or for smaller cuvées such as the new single vineyard wines, probably in stainless steel tanks. Over the years, Anselme Seloisse has come to another philosophical change from his early years, when he championed having vintage variations front and center in his wines. Today, he is of the opinion that perhaps the very best way to express the underlying *terroir* of each wine is to diminish the influence of vintage variations in his non-vintage bottlings is by having these perpetual reserve wine cuvées that stretch back many years, all from the same vineyard sources, so that the common thread in the wines becomes that of *terroir* rather than the base year of the wine. As we will see below, it is not applicable for every wine he produces, but this idea of allowing *terroir* to speak through multiple vintages is certainly a fundamental principle for him today and an evolution in his thinking from his earlier days.

During my initial visit to the cellars in the spring of 2014, as the tasting commenced with a tour of his *vins clairs* from the 2013 vintage in cask, Monsieur Seloisse noted that the only thing he tastes for in his *vins clairs* is the signature of minerality in the underlying wine. He finds that this the fundamental building block of great Champagne and an element that transcends vintage to vintage variations and the differences of grape variety in each wine. As he noted, “I never judge a young wine on its aromatics, only on texture and flavors on the palate- the minerality is so important, as this is what shapes the wine.” As Monsieur Seloisse will typically include about forty percent reserve wines in several of his bottlings (his Cuvée Substance these days is more likely eighty percent reserve wines from its solera), his augmenting of the various soleras of reserve wines in his cellar with each new vintage is of paramount importance, as the addition of the younger wine from the same soils adds energy and fruit elements on top, while the underlying minerality is building up and subsuming vintage characteristics with the older remaining wines in the solera. It is a very unique philosophy for crafting Champagne and the growing number of young *vignerons* who are now aspiring to practice this same approach speaks volumes.

As I noted above, I have only had a single opportunity thus far to visit and taste at the cellars here in Avize (thanks to my epic 2018 flu). The conversation during the tasting with Monsieur Seloisse on that morning in May of 2014 was fast-paced, as he jumped around from subject to subject with great alacrity, as inspiration struck, and put my French seriously to the test. My experience in this regard is hardly unique when tasting with Anselme Seloisse, as he is well-known to follow a blossoming line of thought to its conclusion when he heads off on a tangent. Despite my not getting every question answered directly, it was a great pleasure to taste with him and work through the very promising set of 2013 *vins clairs* in the cellar and then settle into a fine lineup of his finished wines to complete the morning visit. We focused on two of his *lieux à dits* bottlings for the finished Champagne section of our tasting that morning, the Le Chemin de Châlons vineyard in Cramant and Sous le Mont, which is an east-facing vineyard planted solely to pinot noir at the top of the hillside that houses the great Clos des Goisses

vineyard in the village of Mareuil-sur-Aÿ. As I said, the topic of conversation was jumping around briskly that morning and several of my questions were left unanswered as his inspiration took flight, so I am not certain as to how long Anselme had been buying grapes from a producer in Sous le Mont (or whether the older wines he produced from this vineyard were from the same parcel he would eventually purchase), but we certainly tasted this bottling on its own all the way back to the 1999 vintage, despite the first commercial release in his single vineyard series would not occur until 2012 and was from the vintage of 2005!

I hypothesized above that this article might have been more insightful if the flu had not intervened with my scheduled interview and tasting with Monsieur Seloisse in the spring of 2018, but there is certainly some degree of speculation in this assertion, as Anselme Seloisse can be one of the more difficult people to interview in the world of wine. It is not that he is reticent to any degree or guarded about his philosophies or history, but when inspiration strikes, he can soar off on philosophical tangents that can often make it hard to get back to the original question. When the conversation moves off tangentially, it is never in an uninteresting direction, and in my experience, it is often more illuminating to just go with the flow and not try to rein in the conversation, as the new points that he has felt important to discuss are always fascinating and one often is happy to follow along happily with Monsieur Seloisse as he jumps from point to point. But, while Monsieur Seloisse can be very generous with his time and very honest about his point of view on any given point, there is also a sense here that as the reputation for the superb quality of his wines has grown in the last couple of decades of his career, there have been a growing number of people in Champagne who have been happy to try and attach themselves to his coattails and ascribe their techniques as “just like Seloisse” and Anselme is certainly a bit wary about this aspect of his heightened stature in the firmament of Champagne in recent times.

Those occasional, off the wall, early experiments which I alluded to above have given way today to many, many years of truly brilliant wines from Anselme Seloisse (and now his son Guillaume), as he has become one of the master winegrowers in the entire region of Champagne and his wines are no longer the great “insider wines” known only to the Italian and the Parisian wine scene’s *cognoscenti*. But, while there is not a single wine in the Seloisse lineup that I would not rate extremely highly today, it is important to keep in mind that there have unequivocally been some growing pains along the way, and not every wine that Anselme Seloisse has released over the course of his long career was at the same exceptional quality level as his entire lineup is today. In those early days, some wines were really quite new oaky, and not always successfully so, and others ended up being more than a bit oxidative at an early age. The latter condition might have been brought on by very extended aging of reserve wines in the blend in small oak casks, or bottling with very low levels of sulfur dioxide, or from some other aspect of the winemaking and aging process that Monsieur Seloisse was “testing the limits of” back in the day. So, some of his early critics certainly could have had a point, depending on which early wines they might have tried. But, any great artist must be judged by the weight of their entire body of work (certainly I do not love every single Picasso I have seen!), and on this score, it is very clear that Anselme Seloisse has been a *maestro* in Champagne over the totality of his career and the simply beautiful wines that he has released in the last fifteen years, during his mature phase as he likes to say, have been as fine as anything made in Champagne over the same time period.

Today the wines of Champagne Jacques Selosse are almost universally praised (there are still a few who cannot appreciate the style), greatly sought after and quite costly, with the wine world's thirst for these exquisite bottlings far outstripping their availability, and at the close of the second decade of the twenty-first century, it is quite clear that Anselme Selosse has been at the absolute top of his game for many, many years and one of the most exciting producers in the firmament of Champagne. It generally takes both deep pockets and excellent trade connections to find the wines from Champagne Jacques Selosse these days, but happily, they are readily available for drinking off of his wine list at the restaurant at his hotel in Avize. On my first visit there, I was intent on preparing myself for my tasting in the cellars the following morning by savoring a bottle of Monsieur Selosse's wine off of the list with my dinner, but his selection of wines from Champagne's other up and coming small producers (as well as some outstanding *Grandes Marques* bottlings), not to mention a stunning list of selections from Burgundy, the Loire and Rhône Valleys (as well as other regions of France), totally derailed my intention to settle in with one of his wines and I spent the night researching other small *vignerons'* wines from Champagne that I had not tasted previously (many of which were available by the glass at superb prices) and finished up with a bottle of Clos Rougeard's Saumur-Champigny with my main course. In fact, I strongly recommend staying at les Avizés with a group of like-minded friends, as that way, one can share a bit of Selosse Champagne during the stay and still give into the myriad of temptations with other producers and regions on the wine list, as Monsieur Selosse has indeed put together an absolutely terrific cellar at his restaurant!

The Champagne Selosse lineup has evolved a bit over the years. As it stands today, the lineup starts off with the Brut Initial cuvée, which is a blended Blanc de Blancs bottling that always hails from vineyards in the three grand cru villages of Avize, Oger and Cramant. This bottling is now always comprised of three successive vintages, which are assembled, bottled and aged on their fine lees for five and a half to six years prior to disgorgement and preparation for shipping. The reserve wines from the previous two vintages for the Brut Initial bottling spend one year in barrel, after which they are kept in cement tanks prior to blending for a bottling run. A decade ago, the Brut Initial was aged four years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, but this has been extended in recent years to between five and six full years in the cellar. The *vins clairs* from the base year for this cuvée are all barrel-fermented, mostly in a range of 228 liter to 600 liter barrels, with only ten percent of the wood being new these days for the Brut Initial bottling (which is down a bit from days of yore). Typically the grapes for this bottling come from the lower slopes of the Selosse family's vineyards in these three grand cru villages, whereas Anselme and Guillaume reserve the production from the upper slopes of these same vineyards for a different non-vintage cuvée- their Version Originale Extra Brut (denoted as V.O. on the label). The Version Originale is treated completely the same as the Brut Initial in the cellars (other than of course the finishing *dosage*, as Initial is a Brut and V.O. is an Extra Brut), with the primary difference between the two cuvées that the production for the Version Originale bottling hails from the top slopes of his vineyard parcels, where the topsoil is thinner and the underlying expression of minerality more profound.

The Champagne Selosse top blended cuvée reflects Anselme's current belief that *terroir* is best expressed through a blend of vintages, as the wine is called Cuvée Substance and has been made from the same two parcels of vines since 1986 in a solera system that still retains a small percentage of the wine from that first vintage of 1986! The "solera" for the Cuvée Substance

bottling is refreshed each year, after approximately twenty-two percent of the contents are taken off for a new bottling run, replaced with *vins clairs* that have already received one year's *elevage* in *foudre* prior to being added into the solera. These days, Monsieur Seloisse keeps his Cuvée Substance solera aging in a cement tank- the wine was previously held in an epoxy-lined stainless steel tank in his previous winery. The Cuvée Substance is also aged for six years *sur latte*, once a new cuvée has been bottled off from the solera. This wine continues still to be produced solely from the original two vineyard parcels in Avize that have been this wine's foundation since 1986 and, to my palate, this is one of Champagne's greatest cuvées. Though the family philosophy has moved away from expecting vintage variations to speak in their wines, since day one, Anselme has always printed the date of disgorgement on his back labels, so if one knows his cellaring practices for a particular wine, one can easily arrive at the base year for the bottling.

Anselme and Guillaume Seloisse also produce a small amount of Brut Rosé each year. It is an interesting cuvée in that it is essentially the same base wines as the Version Originale (though only a blend of two subsequent vintages, rather than three), with seven to ten percent added still pinot noir included in the cuvée that the Seloisses purchase from Egly-Ouriet in Ambonnay. It is aged just a bit shorter than the V.O. *sur latte*, with an average of five years on its fine lees and is usually finished with a *dosage* of between four and six grams per liter. In the last decade or so, Anselme began to also produce a Demi-Sec bottling which he named Exquise, which hails from a south-facing amphitheater of vines in the village of Oger. This wine spends three years aging *sur latte* and is typically finished with a *dosage* of around twenty-four grams per liter. It is designed to be a Champagne to drink with dessert and it works marvelously well in this regard. There is also routinely a vintage-dated bottling still from Monsieur Seloisse, a Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime, but it is made in fairly small quantities today and no more than five hundred cases are ever produced. Recent vintages that Monsieur Seloisse has produced include 2004, 2003, 2002, 1999 and 1996. In my limited experience with the vintage-dated bottlings, this is still probably the most experimental wine in the Seloisse cellars, as the 2002, 1999 and 1996 were produced with no added sulfites and the ripe 1999 version came in at a rather unprecedented alcohol level of 14.2 percent!

In 2010, Monsieur Seloisse began to release another series of bottlings to further expand his exploration of other various great *terroirs* in Champagne, and today, this has evolved into a six cuvée set of single vineyard bottlings from some of the greatest vineyards in grand cru villages in Champagne. All six of the *Lieux à Dits* bottlings hail from a single parcel and are aged six years on their fine lees prior to disgorgement (as is the case with most of his other bottlings now). The first releases were in 2010, but dated back to the growing season of 2003 and found their way to market after their six-plus years of *elevage*, but there were only a pair of the wines available at the outset: a one hundred percent pinot noir bottling from La Côte Faron in Aÿ and Les Carelles, a Blanc de Blancs bottling from a parcel of vines in Mesnil-sur-Oger. The parcel of La Côte Faron in Aÿ was the older of the two in the Seloisse stable, as it had been purchased by Monsieur Seloisse in 1994, and so this initial release was from a solera which he had started for the wine in that vintage (with the youngest wines in the initial blend hailing from the base year of 2003) and following along the lines of production that was outlined above for the non-vintage bottling of Cuvée Substance. It had previously been sold by the *maison* as Cuvée Contraste and its name was simply changed to reflect its single vineyard origin with this initial

release of the *Lieux à Dits* series. The first release of Les Carelles in 2010 was a bit different, as this plot of vines had only been purchased by Anselme Selosse in 2002, so the initial release was solely from the 2003 vintage, but a solera for this bottling was started at this time as well, so that today, it too has its own perpetual cuvée and is a multi-vintage blend like La Côte Faron.



In 2011, for the second release of the single vineyard bottlings, the two original bottlings of La Côte Faron and Les Carelles were augmented by a second, principally pinot noir-based cuvée, from the *lieu à dit* of Le Bout du Clos in Ambonnay. However, Le Bout de Clos is not entirely pinot noir, as the *cépages* of this wine is eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, reflecting the planting of the family's vineyard parcel. It is the only single vineyard bottling that is not produced from a single grape variety and its first release in the *Lieux à Dits* series was solely from the base year of 2004. In subsequent releases, the wine has started to incorporate some reserve wines from this vineyard as well and eventually it will become a wine made from a perpetual solera like the Les Carelles and La Côte Faron. Back in 2003, when Monsieur Selosse was first getting rolling on his idea for a series of single vineyard bottlings, he had also purchased a small parcel of vines in the *climat* of Sous le Mont in Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, which lies just up behind the Clos des Goisses ridge, to craft a second pure Blanc de Noirs bottling based on pinot noir. The Sous le Mont made its commercial debut in the 2005 vintage, and like the Les Carelles, started out its life as a single vintage wine, but with a solera started to eventually make it another multi-vintage bottling as the solera matured. After its requisite six

years aging *sur latte*, it was released as part of the group beginning in 2012. Interestingly, though Monsieur Selosse only purchased his parcel of vines in Sous le Mont in 2003, as I mentioned above, I have had the pleasure to taste wines made solely from grapes in this vineyard from him all the way back to the 1999 vintage, while visiting in his cellars in Avize. I have to assume that he was experimenting with a wine based on grapes from Sous le Mont to see if it would be worthy as a single vineyard bottling, but did not release any of the earlier wines, as their release into the market would most likely have driven the price up for the parcel of vines he had his eye on to purchase. In any case, when Sous le Mont made its debut in 2012, it was initially a wine from the single vintage of 2005, though Monsieur Selosse started a solera for this wine as well in this year, so that each subsequent release has been a blend of reserve wines from previous iterations as well.

To accompany it in the expanding portfolio of single vineyard bottlings for the 2012 release, Monsieur Selosse also produced a pair of single vineyard bottlings of Blanc de Blancs from the vineyards of les Chantereines in Avize (parts of which had already been in the family vineyard patrimony for many years) and Chemins de Chalons in Cramant. He certainly augmented his holdings in les Chantereines with the purchase of some additional vines in this *climat* leading into his decision to start bottling the wine on its own, but, as I mentioned above, his plot of vines in Chemins de Chalons were only purchased in 2004. Though these two cuvées made their commercial debuts with the inaugural release of Sous le Mont in 2012, both of these Blanc de Blancs bottlings started out as principally from the vintage of 2004, and were given one year's worth of additional cellar aging than the Le Bout du Clos that also began as a base year 2004 wine and was released in 2011. Peter Liem in his fine new book on Champagne reports that the initial releases of both Chemins de Chalons and les Chantereines included reserve wines from both 2002 and 2003 in the first releases based on 2004, though how this was done with Chemins de Chalons (which Anselme only purchased in 2004) is not clear- perhaps he had bought fruit from this parcel in the lead up to buying the vines? Both wines, of course, also have had soleras started for them and today are multi-vintage blends. With the addition of les Chantereines and Chemins de Chalons to the lineup, this brought the single vineyard portfolio up to its present day number of six, with three of the bottlings Blanc de Blancs from the grand cru villages of Avize, Cramant and Mesnil-sur-Oger, two pure Blanc de Noirs bottlings from Aÿ and Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, and the one multi-varietal blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay hailing from Le Bout du Clos in Ambonnay. The last two single vineyard bottlings of Chemins de Chalons and les Chantereines are the most limited in quantity, and the only way that they can be purchased from the domaine is as part of a six pack of all the different single vineyard bottlings.

While it is still relatively early days for the *Lieux à Dits* bottlings, it is my impression that each one is getting better and better with each subsequent release (not that I get to taste them with any regularity), as the incorporation of more reserve wines in each cuvée as the soleras for each have started to develop, has given them added depth and complexity. I can only believe that we are still only seeing the tip of the iceberg with each of these wines and that they will only really reach their true heights of quality expression in the coming years of Guillaume's tenure as head of Champagne Selosse, as the longer the soleras of reserve wines for each one are around, the greater their impact is going to be on the bottled wines. To date, I most emphatically have not been able to isolate one or two of the single vineyards as a favorite, as each have been exemplary

and truly compelling wines in their own rights and they all rank right up in the very top echelon of Champagne bottlings. I have only had the pleasure to taste all six together on one occasion, and this was when the 2012 releases were put on the market, as Mannie Berk of The Rare Wine Company organized a horizontal tasting dinner of the 2012 releases to celebrate the final unveiling of all six *Lieux à Dits*. It was truly a memorable evening! Beyond this tasting, the examples I have been fortunate enough to taste have been either at the cellars in Avize or as single bottles when good fortune has stepped forward, so I have never yet been able to settle in and taste all six side by side since that very first tasting. Given that all of these wines are getting better and better with each passing year, as their soleras start to build up a base of true reserve wines, we are still only witnessing the first chapters of their ultimate quality and they will be even more profound wines with another ten or twelve vintages finding their way into the perpetual reserve program for each bottling.

While Anselme Selosse has really been at the top of his game since the 1990s (Gault-Millau recognized him as France's winemaker of the year in 1994), with his period of wilder experimentation giving way to an extended stretch of pure renaissance Champagne-making, his long-running period of success has not been without a few speed bumps as well. Most recently, this included the theft in the early spring of 2013 of thirty-nine hundred bottles of his Champagne from his cellars at the winery, as well as many hundreds of new labels that were no doubt intended by the thieves to be used to create fake bottles of Selosse Champagne. But, despite the theft, the last two decades of his career have been ones of maturation as a winegrower, with his philosophical foundation firmly established and the style of his wines settling into a fairly tight pattern. One can say that today, the house style of Champagne Jacques Selosse is one of slightly more weighty wines than the average in Champagne, as the house still crops at lower yields than the vast majority of its neighbors, with perhaps a bit more physiological ripeness than many houses. However, the wines are not as powerful as they were in the early days, and others (particularly among the younger generation of top flight *vignerons* in the region) have followed Anselme's lead and have started to rein in their own yields in the vineyards and harvest riper grapes as well. The mature Selosse style still reflects wines with a bit of new oaky personality, as the *vins clairs* continue to be aged in Burgundy casks for nearly a full year before *assemblage*, but again, the percentage of new oak here is down from the early days and is typically around ten percent for most of the wines and does not stand out nearly as much as was the case in the decade of the 1980s. Also, as many of the new generation of *vignerons* in Champagne are also introducing a touch of oak influence to their wines by aging their own *vins clairs* in casks, again, this trait in the Selosse wines is not quite as remarkable as it seemed in those early years.

The Selosse house style today continues to be wines that combine richness (from lower yields and a bit more ripeness to the fruit) with excellent cut and mineral drive, as the *vins clairs* do not generally go through malolactic fermentation and always retain a fine girdle of acidity in their structural harness. Monsieur Selosse is officially an agnostic when it comes to malolactic fermentation for his *vins clairs*, allowing the cask to decide on its own, but generally, the *vins clairs* do not go through malo here. And, with lots of old vines in the Selosse vineyard parcels, there is plenty of minerality to ground and deliver the depth of fruit in the wines, so they do not stand out quite as much from the crowd as they did back at the outset. Part of the reason for this is, of course, that Anselme has mellowed a bit and settled into a more established style for his

wines (having already tested the limits back in his youth) and, also, that the overall style of Champagne has evolved in his direction at a great many houses and small domaines in the last fifteen or twenty years. As I have mentioned often in this feature, Anselme Selosse has been an inspiration to many, many of the very best small growers of the new generation in Champagne, and many of his tenets have been adopted, one way or another, in many of the finest cellars around Champagne by this up and coming cadre of star *vignerons*. The Selosse wines today are also a bit more mainstream in style, as the experiments with low SO2 regimens have also eased off a bit, though Anselme and his son Guillaume remain fans of using the minimum sulfur necessary to stabilize and protect the wines, but again, they now have plenty of company in this regard.

In terms of *dosage*, the only two Brut bottlings today from Champagne Jacques Selosse are the Brut Initial and the Brut Rosé, with all the remainder of the cuvées here listed as Extra Brut, with the exception of the Demi-Sec bottling of Exquise. While the overriding philosophy in all of the Selosse Champagne cuvées is that “there are no set rules” and each year is different, there are general ranges of finishing *dosage* that Anselme and Guillaume have used for their various bottlings over the last decade. For the Brut Initial, *dosage* will generally be around five grams per liter, depending on the style of the base year. The Champagne Selosse Brut Rosé is usually finished with a *dosage* of between four and six grams per liter. For the Version Originale Extra Brut, *dosage* will be around 1.5 grams per liter. Both the Selosse cuvées of Extra Brut Millésime and Cuvée Substance can range anywhere from zero to four grams per liter of *dosage*, again, depending on the underlying style of a given vintage or base year. All of the *Lieux à Dits* bottlings in the series are also finished with a range of *dosage* between zero and four grams per liter. There is also a completely exotic wine that has been produced by Monsieur Selosse, reflecting his interest in Sherry, which he has called “Il Etait un Fois” and which translates as “Once Upon a Time”. I tasted this only once in the cellars in Avize back in the spring of 2014. It was originally made with a *dosage* of between forty and fifty grams per liter, fortified to eighteen percent alcohol and then left in cask for eleven years and never topped up, so that by evaporation, the wine eventually arrived at 157 grams per liter of residual sugar. If one can picture and Oloroso-styled wine, fully based in the chardonnay and *terroir* of Avize, then one can get an idea what this very unique wine is like.

As I mentioned above, January of 2020 will mark the official generational changeover at Champagne Jacques Selosse, as Anselme will “officially” retire and Guillaume Selosse will become the “official” head of the estate. In point of fact, this transition has really already taken place, as Guillaume has been making the wines now (primarily on his own, no doubt with Anselme happy to lend advice if need be) for the last few years, and when I made my appointment in the spring of 2018 to spend a morning with Anselme, he commented that “you really ought to be talking with Guillaume instead of me these days, as he is making the wines.” While Guillaume has been working side by side with his father Anselme at the family domaine in Avize, he was also doing a bit of “moonlighting” and creating a few of his own, single vineyard bottlings, which he has been commercializing under the “Champagne Guillaume S.” label. His first vintage was a 2008 from the *lieu à dit* of Au Dessus du Gros Mont in Cramant, but he did not sell any of the 2008, but rather retained all of it in the cellars to act as a reserve wine for the first commercial release of the bottling in the base year of 2009. Guillaume had received this small parcel of seventy year-old vines in Cramant from his grandmother as a

present on his eighteenth birthday, with the vineyard lying on the far northeastern corner of Cramant on the boundary with the neighboring grand cru village of Oiry. He aged his base year 2009 bottling along the lines of the family cellaring practices, so it was not released onto the market until 2016 after six years on its fine lees. He augmented this small bottling from Au Dessus du Gros Mont (only 648 bottles were produced of the 2009/2008 blend) with fruit he purchased from the Coessens family in the *lieu à dit* of Largillier in the Côtes des Bar, and which is composed entirely of pinot noir planted on the region's Kimmeridgian limestone. This Blanc de Noirs bottling was first launched in the base year of 2013, with a reserve of the 2012 vintage. It is uncertain if Guillaume will continue to produce his Blanc de Noirs bottling once he takes over full-time responsibility for Champagne Jacques Selosse in January of 2020, but it seems likely that his micro-cuvée from Au Dessus du Gros Mont will continue after the generational baton is passed at the family estate.

However, Anselme Selosse is not about to ride off into the sunset when Guillaume takes over Champagne Jacques Selosse at the start of next year, as he and his wife Corrine still have their lovely, small hotel and restaurant, les Avisés, to manage right here in the heart of the village of Avize. The venture came about as the original cellars for the family domaine had become too cramped as the new millennium unfolded and Anselme eventually took a look at the nearby closed winery of Bricout-Delbeck, which had been open in Avize between 1966 and 2003 and was now for sale. The cellars and winery came along with a lovely, old estate house (which the previous owners had used as offices for their *maison*), so when the Selosse family purchased the new winery and storage facility, they came along with this lovely old house that was the perfect size for a small hotel and restaurant. *Et voila-* a second career was in the offing for both Corrine and Anselme and they have done a magnificent job! The hotel has ten large and very comfortably-appointed rooms, and the restaurant, run by head Chef Stéphane Rossillon and his charming wife, Nathalie, is one of the finest tables in all of the Champagne region. I have already mentioned how beautifully stocked the cellar is for the restaurant's wine list, as Anselme Selosse has put together a superb range of wines from some of his favorite domaines in Burgundy, the Loire and the Rhône Valley, not to mention a brilliant Champagne list. The restaurant offers simply outstanding cuisine and is also open to visitors who are not the guests of the hotel (if there is a reservation available) and it is a short and very easy drive from Épernay and its environs to Avize; I have happily made the drive to dine here on evenings when I was not staying at the hotel, as it truly is one of the best restaurants in the entire region. So, one imagines that there will still be plenty for Anselme and Corrine to do once he hands over the keys of the cellar officially to Guillaume at the start of next year.

The following notes are arranged by cuvée, starting with Brut Initial, the Exquise Demi-Sec, Version Originale Extra Brut, Brut Rosé, Cuvée Substance, Extra Brut Millésime and the Lieux à Dit bottlings. Within each cuvée subsection, I have provided some further background information on each bottling (unless I have already done so above), and then listed the wines chronologically by base year or vintage. As I noted above, as the Selosse philosophy regarding vintage variations in the non-vintage wines has evolved, base years have become far less important of late than they were in the early days. Some of the notes have appeared in previous Champagne articles of the newsletter and I have included them again here to have a single resource available to date for the wines from Anselme and Guillaume Selosse.

Brut Initial Blanc de Blancs

Monsieur Selosse has produced this blended Blanc de Blancs bottling since his earliest days back at the family winery in Avize. In the first years, this wine was not labeled as “Brut Initial”, but rather as “Brut Tradition”, but, as I mentioned above, the wine has always hailed from the same vineyards in the grand cru villages of Avize, Cramant and Oger. I should note that the spelling of the cuvée has also varied a bit over the years, with the French spelling of “Brut Initiale” appearing on labels in the early years of the new millennium and now, this having changed to “Brut Initial” for more recent releases. (For the sake of clarity, I have used the current spelling for all of the wines below.) While there are no hard and fast precepts for this bottling, the general rule of thumb is that sixty percent of the blend will hail from a particular base year, with the remaining portion being about twenty percent each of the preceding two years. This would of course vary a bit depending on yields and style of a particular base year vintage, but as a rough sketch, these percentages are usually pretty close to the final blend of Brut Initial that is released each year. Like all of the wines from Anselme Selosse, the *vins clairs* for this particular bottling are barrel-fermented, with the percentage of new casks used each year approximately ten percent, which, as I mentioned above, this percentage of new wood is probably down a bit from the very early days of Monsieur Selosse’s tenure as the head of the family estate. Fermentation for the Initial *vins clairs* are conducted in a range of different casks, of 228, 400 and 600 liters. The period of aging on the fine lees has extended for the Brut Initial rather significantly over the last decade or so, as this wine was originally aged for only three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, but this was stretched out to four years beginning in 2007, five years by 2013 and the most recent release that I have tasted (disgorged in January of 2016) spent nearly six years aging on its fine lees. Like all of the Selosse bottlings, the Brut Initial ages long and gracefully after it is released into the market and is really a wine that is better with four or five years of bottle age after release than it is when it first comes out of the cellars. Thirty years or more of potential longevity is easily within reach for most iterations of Brut Initial. Today, the domaine produces twenty-seven hundred cases of Initial each year, so this is by a wide margin their largest production wine. I had the good fortune to be invited to a deep vertical of Brut Initial organized out in San Francisco by Mannie Berk of The Rare Wine Company (who is Monsieur Selosse’s US importer) back in January of 2017, so I have far more depth of detailed notes on this particular bottling than any other from Champagne Jacques Selosse.

One of the things that was most striking during our vertical of Brut Initial in San Francisco was that this bottling is quite unique in the pantheon of Monsieur Selosse’s wines today, as it is still very much emblematic of its underlying base year, and this can hardly be said of the remainder of his stellar lineup of cuvées. In this regard, the Brut Initial based on the 2009 vintage for example, is ripe, gently exotic and quite powerful, while the Brut Initial from the base year of 2004 is clean, pure and quite a bit more tightly-knit and racy in personality. In many ways, the Brut Initial bottling is the only non-vintage cuvée that still reflects Anselme Selosse’s early philosophy that a Champagne should be fairly reflective of its growing season (in addition to its underlying terroir) and that vintage variations are to be desired in the finished wines. However, the roughly forty percent of reserve wines in each cuvée also give the bottling a consistency from iteration to iteration that is most impressive and plays an equally pivotal role in shaping the personalities of the wines. In my experience, the Brut Initial always shows its bit of new oak on both the nose and palate, and this is most striking when a cuvée is first released, and one of the strongest reasons I can see for aging this wine for at least a few years further after it is

released into the market by Monsieur Seloisse is to allow the new wood component here to fully and seamlessly integrate into the wine. This will take a handful of years to do so completely, and if one has enough patience, it is a course of action that is routinely and richly rewarded as the influence of the oak fades seamlessly into the background and becomes a beautiful foundation for the wine as it blossoms into full maturity.



Brut Initial Blanc de Blancs NV- Champagne Jacques Seloisse (disgorged January 2016)

This most recent release of Brut Initial (at the time of our vertical tasting in January of 2017) is from the base year of 2009, with the remainder of the blend made up of wines from 2008 and 2007. It was disgorged in January of 2016 and saw nearly six years aging *sur latte*. The wine is a terrific bottle in the making, with a flamboyant and rather exotic personality, but plenty of underlying mineral drive and lovely structure. The wine is still in its youthful adolescence and has not yet fully integrated its new wood, but offers up beautiful promise in its bouquet of pear, delicious apple, musky floral tones redolent of acacia blossoms, chalky and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely ripe in personality, with a rock solid core, fine soil signature, elegant *mousse* and fine focus and grip on the long and perfectly balanced finish. This wine is of course, approachable today, but I would not touch a bottle for at least another three to five years and allow the wood to disappear into the body of the wine more completely. 2020-2045+. 92.

Brut Initial Blanc de Blancs NV- Champagne Jacques Seloisse

The October 2014 disgorgement of Brut Initial is from the base year of 2008, with 2007 and 2006 juice comprising the remainder of the blend. This is a beautifully classic and refined example, soaring from the glass in a pure and youthful aromatic blend of pear, white peach,

chalky soil tones, a touch of tangerine, spring flowers and vanillin oak. This is very floral in personality, but not as exotically musky as the 2009 version. On the palate the wine is pure class, with its full-bodied and seamless format presenting excellent depth at the core, refined, pinpoint bubbles, lovely focus and nascent complexity and a very long, minerally and elegant finish. This is very, very easy to drink today, but again, patience will be rewarded with an even more beautiful bottle! 2020-2045+. **94.**

Brut Initial Blanc de Blancs NV- Champagne Jacques Selosse

This particular iteration of Brut Initial is from the base year of 2007 and the wine is quite a bit more developed aromatically than the 2008 version. It was the first release of Brut Initial to receive an additional year aging *sur latte*, as it was disgorged in July of 2013 and spent five years on its fine lees. The bouquet shows plenty of secondary, mature elements in its mélange of sweet hazelnut, apple, peach, chalky soil tones, brioche and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open in profile, with a good core, fine soil signature, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the complex and fully mature finish. 2007 is a far more forward year than 2008 and this is very much in evidence in this release of Brut Initial. The wine still has plenty of potential for longevity, but this is already into its plateau of peak maturity and there is no reason to defer gratification. 2017-2030. **90.**

Brut Initial Blanc de Blancs NV- Champagne Jacques Selosse

Like so many 2006 bottlings from Champagne, the Brut Initial from this base year is now at a beautiful moment in its evolution and is drinking with great style and breed. As is always the case, approximately forty percent of this cuvée is composed of 2005 and 2004 reserve wines. This release was disgorged in December of 2011. The complex bouquet is pure and refined, offering up scents of apple, orange, lovely minerality, sweet almond, a touch of oak and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully soil-driven, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, excellent acids and lovely focus and grip on the very long, complex finish. A beautiful bottle that is now into its apogee. 2017-2035+. **92+.**

Brut Initial Blanc de Blancs NV- Champagne Jacques Selosse

The 2005 base year iteration of Brut Initial is quite a bit less evolved than the *à point* version from 2006. The reserve wines here are from the classic year of 2004 and the torrid summer of 2003, but there is no sign of any “forward” influence from the 2003 juice in the blend and this wine is young, structured and very, very promising. It was disgorged in October of 2010 and the bouquet wafts from the glass in a nascently complex blend of apple, pear, chalky minerality, a touch of orange zest and a nicely integrated base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, fine balance and a very long, youthful and focused finish. This is not hard to drink today, but it is still climbing in quality and has not yet fully blossomed, so I would give it a few more years in the cellar. It is going to be special. 2020-2040+. **93.**

Brut Initial Blanc de Blancs NV- Champagne Jacques Selosse

The string of Brut Initial from the 2006 to 2004 vintages are all superb in their own ways, with their underlying base years very much in evidence in the stylistic variations that they present when tasted side by side. This wine hails from the base year of 2004, with reserve wines from 2003 and 2002 in the blend here, so it is not surprising that this is an outstanding release of Brut Initiale, with the wine delivering a fine aromatic constellation of pear, orange zest, brioche, chalky minerality, buttery oak and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, without the rock solid core of the 2005 Base Year, but with plenty of inner sanctum intensity, bright, seamless acids and laser-like focus on the

very, very long and complex finish. I love this version of Brut Initial, which is drinking with generosity and refinement today, but is still climbing and will be even better down the road! It was disgorged in October of 2009. 2017-2040. **93+**.

Brut Initial Blanc de Blancs NV- Champagne Jacques Selosse

While the 2003 Base Year bottling of Initial was not the finest in our vertical lineup in San Francisco, it may well be the most impressive, as the vintage's signature was beautifully integrated into the cuvée's own stylistic paradigms and the wine was truly a lovely synthesis of the two. I do not know if there was a bit more reserve wine used here to counter the unique style of the growing season of 2003, but at least twenty percent each of the vintages of 2002 and 2001 were also part of the blend here. This wine was disgorged in January of 2008. The bouquet is deep, complex and nicely mature, as it offers up scents of fresh apricot, hazelnut, a fine base of minerality, a touch of iodine, lovely smokiness and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and vibrant, with a fine core, impressive complexity, elegant *mousse* and good, but not great length on the very nicely balanced finish. This is just a touch short on the backend in comparison to the other Initiales in this lineup, but it is the only minor flaw in what is otherwise a really lovely bottle of mature bubbly. 2017-2030. **90**.

Brut Initial Blanc de Blancs NV- Champagne Jacques Selosse

This bottling of Brut Initial is from the base year of 2002, and as one might expect, it is one of the finest iterations of this cuvée from Monsieur Selosse in the last twenty years. It was disgorged in July of 2007. The exceptional quality of the 2002 vintage is very much in evidence here, enervating the wine on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a stunning blend of pear, apricot, gentle floral tones, a lovely base of chalky soil, almond skin, brioche and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, zesty and rock solid at the core, with lovely purity and focus, elegant *mousse*, laser-like focus and outstanding mineral drive on the long, poised and vibrant finish. Great juice. 2017-2040. **94**.

Brut Initial Blanc de Blancs NV- Champagne Jacques Selosse (disgorged July 2004)

This particular bottling of Brut Initial was disgorged in July of 2004 and is from the base year of 2000; its reserve wines are from the vintages of 1999 and 1998. The wine now is absolutely *à point*, wafting from the glass in a mature and complex mix of apple, fresh apricot, chalky minerality, smoke, gentle nuttiness and a topnote of iodine. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles, lovely focus and balance and a long, complex finish. This is a perfect example of the rewards of some extended cellaring for Brut Initiale! 2017-2030. **93**.

Brut Initial Blanc de Blancs NV- Champagne Jacques Selosse

This particular release of the Brut Initial from Anselme Selosse is from the base year of 1998 (with reserves from 1997 and 1996). It was disgorged in September of 2003, as the wine was not aged as long *sur latte* back in this era as it is today. However, having now spent more than a dozen years in the cellar as well, the wine is at its apogee and drinking with plenty of style and grace. The bouquet offers up a fine constellation of apricot, tangerine, walnut, salty soil tones, Blanc de Blancs smokiness and a bit of iodine in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully generous at the core, with excellent structure and focus, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and fine length and grip on the very classy finish. There is perhaps just a touch more depth at the core in the 2000 Base Year version, but this too is an excellent bottle at its zenith of peak drinking. 2017-2030. **92**.

Brut Initial Blanc de Blancs NV- Champagne Jacques Selosse

This version of Brut Initial was disgorged in December of 2002 and hails from the base year of 1997. It is lovely and quite a bit more tertiary in its aromatic and flavor maturity than either Initiale from the base years of 1998 or 1996 that flanked it at this tasting. This is at a fine moment for drinking, if one likes the nutty notes of fully mature Blanc de Blancs, as it offers up a fine nose of hazelnut, peach, baked apple, a touch of browned butter, a good base of soil and loads of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly refined, with sound acids, rather delicate *mousse*, but still fine length and grip on the complex and utterly seamless finish. This is probably starting to creep towards the far side of its plateau, but retains plenty of life in it and is drinking beautifully in its more advanced persona. 2017-2025+. **91.**

Brut Initial Blanc de Blancs NV- Champagne Jacques Selosse

The oldest of our Brut Initial bottlings at our vertical tasting in San Francisco (disgorged in July of 2001) was this stellar 1996 Base Year version, which is every bit as stunning as one might expect from a wine based primarily on this great and very long-lived vintage. This wine seems ten years younger than the above, soaring from the glass in a vibrant and complex blend of apple, pear, hazelnut, chalky minerality, orange zest, smoke and a nice topnote of soil salinity that Initial always seems to show with bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, zesty and rock solid at the core, with a beautiful combination of ripe fruit and racy acids. The finish is very long, focused, complex and utterly seamless, with elegant *mousse*, bottomless depth and a very, very long, still fairly youthful finish. A beautiful wine with decades of life still ahead of it. 2017-2040. **94.**

Brut Tradition Blanc de Blancs NV- Champagne Jacques Selosse

Brut Tradition was the old name for the Brut Initial, so this is in essence the same cuvée as the wines above, though with a bit more bottle age and hailing back to the vintage of 1996 as its base wine (with reserves from 1994 and 1995) It was served during The Rare Wine Company's *Lieux à Dit* dinner tasting back in 2013 and I reprint the note here for completeness in the article. The wine was disgorged in 2001, so one can see that this cuvée did not age quite as long *sur latte* back in this era. This too is drinking beautifully, wafting from the glass in a very classy blend of toasted almond, baked peaches, a touch of lavender, brioche, chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant, with a fine core, impeccable focus and balance, gentle *mousse*, good acids and really lovely length and grip on the complex and *à point* finish. This seems to have a bit more spine of acidity to it than the Brut Initial disgorged in 2003 and I would expect this wine to keep a bit longer as a result. A superb bottle of mature bubbly. 2013-2020+. **93.**

Exquise Blanc de Blancs Demi-Sec

Exquise Blanc de Blancs Demi-Sec NV- Champagne Jacques Selosse

I had never had the pleasure to taste this limited release bottling of Demi-Sec from Anselme Selosse, which he crafts with an eye to matching with dessert and which it paired beautifully with at the end of a vertical Domaine Dujac Clos de la Roche dinner that I participated in back in the summer of 2016. Monsieur Selosse only makes a thousand bottles of Exquise, with this particular iteration disgorged in May of 2015 and hailing from the base year of 2011. It was finished off with a dosage of twenty-four grams per liter. I had originally reported that this was the same base cuvée as Initial, with a more generous dosage, but it turns out that the Selosse family has a specific parcel of south-facing vines in Oger that they use to make this superb Demi-Sec. The current release of Exquise is really lovely, offering up a complex nose of

pear, patissière, chalky minerality, custard and a pungent topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with an excellent spine of acidity to carry the additional sweetness, fine focus, refined mousse and a very long, crisp and moderately sweet finish. Just a lovely wine. 2016-2030. **94.**



Spring in the vineyards of Avize, with the town center up on the hill in the distance.

Version Originale (Cuvée V.O) Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV

As I noted above, the Selosse family's bottling of Version Originale is crafted very similarly to that of the Brut Initiale, hailing from the domaine's parcels of vines in the grand cru villages of Avize, Oger and Cramant. The grapes for the Version Originale are all taken from the top of the slopes in these parcels, with a goal towards producing a wine of deeper mineral drive and superior structure for long-term aging. This is the cuvée that I probably have the least personal experience with in the Champagne Selosse lineup these days. The wine is now made the same as the Brut Initial in that it is effectively a blend of three subsequent vintages, with approximately sixty percent of the cuvée hailing from a given base year and the forty percent reserve wines in the blend a fifty-fifty mix of the preceding two years. The wine is now typically aged for six years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and release into the market. In the past, when the Brut Initial was spending around three years on its fine lees, the Version Originale was already seeing five years aging *sur latte* and hence, was always a bit older when it was released into the market than its companion release of the new bottling of Brut Initial. However, with

Initial now approaching six years aging prior to disgorgement, the gap between the two bottlings may be closing and they now be emerging from the cellars with the same base year, but I am not certain of this, as the most recent bottle of Cuvée V.O. that I purchased had already been here in the states for a few years. The Version Originale is one of the most limited bottlings in the Champagne Selsosse lineup, as only thirty-six hundred bottles are produced each year.

Cuvée V.O. Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV - Champagne Jacques Selsosse

This particular bottle of Cuvée V.O. non-vintage Extra Brut from Champagne Jacques Selsosse is from the base year of 2009 (with reserve wines from 2008 and 2007); it was disgorged in November of 2016. The wine is starting to just blossom properly and delivers a refined aromatic constellation of pear, apple, hazelnuts, brioche, a superb base of chalky soil tones, plenty of smokiness and a discreet base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with great backend mineral drive, bright acids, refined *mousse* and a very long, very pure and complex finish. This shows just a touch of the sunny generosity of its base year of 2009, as well as a bit more oxidative style than many recent Selsosse wines I have tasted, but the underlying chassis provided from the 2008 and 2007 wines in the blend also give it plenty of lift and cut. Very tasty juice. 2019-2040. **93.**

Cuvée V.O. Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV- Champagne Jacques Selsosse

The Version Originale bottling from Anselme Selsosse hails entirely from fruit in the upper section of the family's vineyards in the grand cru villages of Avize, Cramant and Oger, with this wine spending fully seven years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement in October of 2010, making this particular bottle base year 2002. The wine is finished off with a very minimal dosage of 1.3 grams per liter. The wine is deeper and more powerful in personality than the Initial, but I am not sure if it is actually superior, or just different stylistically. The outstanding bouquet delivers a constellation of pear, lemon, chalky minerality, brioche, spring flowers, a touch of oak influence and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a rock solid core, very refined *mousse*, laser-like focus and great grip on the very long, intensely-flavored finish. This is another absolutely gorgeous bottle of bubbly. 2015-2030+. **94+.**

Brut Rosé

As I noted above, the Brut Rosé bottling from Champagne Selsosse is essentially the same cuvée as the Version Originale, hailing from the top of the family's vineyards in Avize, Cramant and Oger, blended in with anywhere from seven to ten percent still pinot noir purchased from Egly-Ouriet in Ambonnay. However, this bottling does not age as long *sur latte* as the Version Originale, as it spends five years aging *sur latte*, rather than the six in the cellars for the Cuvée V.O. bottlings. It also is not quite the same blend as the V.O., as it is a blend of two successive years, rather than the three for the Version Originale. The Selsosse family only makes six thousand bottles of their Brut Rosé each year, with the wine typically finished with a *dosage* of between four and six grams per liter, depending on the style of the particular base year.

Brut Rosé NV- Champagne Jacques Selsosse

This particular bottle of Brut Rosé from Anselme Selsosse was disgorged in July of 2016 and is from the base year of 2010, with its reserve wines from the 2009 vintage. Like all of Anselme and Guillaume's Rosés, it is essentially a Blanc de Blancs bottling from the same vineyard parcels as the V.O., blended with a bit of still pinot noir from Ambonnay. The wine

offers up a beautifully complex and elegant bouquet of wild strawberries, nectarine, chalky minerality, a touch of sweet bread dough, gentle savory notes that hint at cumin and very delicate floral topnotes that evoke violet and lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a rock solid core, lovely focus and grip, refined *mousse* and a very long, very elegant finish. This is just an outstanding example of ageworthy Rosé that is starting now to drink with great style, but has decades of life ahead of it. 2019-2045. 93+.

Cuvée Substance

Cuvée Substance is the longest-running solera wine in Champagne Selosse's lineup, as the origin of the perpetual reserves that make up the lion's share of this blend originated in 1986. The wine has been based since the very beginning in two different *lieux à dits* in the village of Avize, one being les Chantereines (that is also now home to one of the single vineyard bottlings produced by the Selosse family since 2012) and the other being les Marvillannes. This wine was not originally named Cuvée Substance, as its original name was "Origine", but as Monsieur Selosse had failed to copyright the name, he was eventually forced to change the name of this bottling to Cuvée Substance in 1998 (and presumably copyrighted this one!). According to Anselme's recollections, the original inspiration for Cuvée Substance was founded in the differences between Champagne and Burgundy as he saw it back in his student days in Beaune, when the most prestigious wines of Champagne were based on their vintage of origin, but those in Burgundy were based on the ranking of their respective vineyards in the Appellation Contrôlée hierarchy of grand cru, premier cru and *villages* level wines. In the mid-1980s he felt that if he could create a bottling that drew upon two of his very finest *lieux à dits* in Avize, he could start to craft a Champagne whose reputation was built solely upon *terroir*. It is most likely that his evolution in thinking about how to best reflect *terroir* in his wines developed as he continued to craft his Cuvée Substance and saw how the vintage variations from good years and more challenging ones were ameliorated within his solera and created a compelling wine each and every release.

As I mentioned briefly above, the new vintage of *vins clairs* that are to be directed to the Cuvée Substance do not go directly into the solera of reserve wines, as is the case with many producers who have now adopted this approach of a perpetual reserve wine lots for their non-vintage bottlings, as Monsieur Selosse chooses to age the new *vins clairs* first for a full year in small, Burgundy casks prior to their incorporation into the Cuvée Substance reserve wines. Both Peter Liem and Antonio Galloni have commented that Anselme Selosse is the only grower in Champagne who uses a "true solera" system for his reserve wines, and by this, I assume that they are referring to the Selosse family's preference to age their new *vins clairs* in cask for one year before they are allowed into the Cuvée Substance reserve solera. After this year in barrel, the *vins clairs* are the ready for incorporation into the solera, so twenty-two percent of the volume of the solera is drawn off and bottled (to be the next release of Cuvée Substance after six years aging *sur latte*) and then the *vins clairs* who have spent a year in barrel go into the solera. In the meantime, next year's addition to the solera is already starting its aging regimen in Burgundy casks for the process to be repeated one year down the road. It is a fascinating approach to crafting a top tier bottling of Champagne, as the emphasis is not on blending a combination of unique reserve wines and a base year cuvée, but just taking the production from two vineyards in Avize and allowing them to find their way from year to year within the solera. I have to imagine, as the needs of the Cuvée Substance never requires the entire grape production from either of the

two *climats* that go into the blend, that there is a bit of variation from year to year as to which sections of the vineyards are earmarked for Cuvée Substance (as some of the production from the Selsosse family's parcel in les Chantereines is, of course, now reserved for a single vineyard bottling as well), but this has unquestionably been Anselme Selsosse's ultimate expression of *terroir* in his various bottlings, at least until the first two of the *Lieux à Dits* series was released in 2010. Since 2012, we now have six additional single vineyard wines being produced basically along the lines of the Cuvée Substance in the cellars here, and all of these *Lieux à Dits* bottlings will begin to resemble the Substance more and more as their own personal soleras get older. There are two hundred and seventy-five cases per year produced of Cuvée Substance.

Cuvée Substance Blanc de Blancs Brut NV - Champagne Jacques Selsosse

I enjoyed a glass of this with my cheese course at Les Avizés (courtesy of my neighbors' generosity) the night before our tasting with Monsieur Selsosse in the spring of 2014. This was the most recent release at the time, as it had been disgorged in October of 2013. The wine offers up a deep and still quite youthful nose of fresh apricot, pear, beautifully complex, limestone minerality, smoke, gentle nuttiness, a touch of lemon peel and a faint glimmer of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and superbly complex, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and outstanding focus and grip on the very long and pure finish. A beautiful wine. 2014-2030+. **94+**.

Cuvée Substance Blanc de Blancs Brut NV - Champagne Jacques Selsosse

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

Cuvée Substance Blanc de Blancs Brut NV - Champagne Jacques Selsosse

This particular bottle of Cuvée Substance was disgorged all the way back in 2001 and had really developed lovely secondary layers of more mature elements on both the nose and palate with the additional decade of bottle age and is drinking at its apogee today. The gorgeous, mature bouquet offers up scents of apple, quince, a touch of hazelnut, salty soil tones, wheat toast, a dollop of white mushroom, nutskins and that signature Selsosse smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with fine mid-palate intensity, gentle, teasing *mousse*, and impressive focus and balance on the fully mature and very long finish. This wine is getting towards the far side of its plateau of maturity, and though it will continue to drink beautifully for many more years to come, its bubbles are starting to dissipate and for those who demand a fair bit of effervescence in their mature Champagne, I would plan to drink up this wine over the next handful of years. It will no doubt continue to drink well far beyond that point, but it will probably be almost a still wine at that point. For my palate, I would opt for drinking it up in the next six or seven years. 2013-2020+. **93**.



Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime

Monsieur Selosse has been making a bit less vintage-dated bubbly in recent times, as his evolution in thinking about *terroir* and how to best express it in the context of Champagne has moved him away from vintage wines and more towards the development of more solera-based bottlings such as the *Lieux à Dits* series. As the focus of the top bottlings here at Champagne Jacques Selosse has moved away from vintage-dating, the number of bottlings from a given year has been reduced, but occasionally one still finds its way into bottle in the Selosse family's cellars. Today, Monsieur Selosse will say that the vintage-dated bottlings emanate from "a given growing season that insists on having its own history", and when these come along, a small lot of vintage-dated Extra Brut will be produced. The most recent one of these that I have heard about in the market is the 2005 vintage, but I have not had the pleasure to taste that wine yet and the only recent vintage I have tasted is the 1999. On the occasions when a vintage-dated Blanc de Blancs bottling is produced *chez* Selosse, it hails from two different vineyards in Avize: les Chantereines (which is also home to the fruit from Cuvée Substance and its own single vineyard bottlings in the *Lieux à Dits* series) and les Maladries du Midi, which has far more clay in its soil composition than the classically chalky les Chantereines. The most prolific vintage bottlings from Champagne Selosse in recent times have produced six thousand bottles' worth, with some vintages producing decidedly less. The wine now spends nine years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, varies in its *dosage* from zero to four grams, and as I mentioned above, has been bottled without any added SO₂ in a few recent vintages as well.

1999 Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime- Champagne Jacques Selosse (magnum)

Anselme Selosse really likes to make sure he harvests physiologically ripe fruit and picks later than most of his neighbors. In the 1999 vintage, this may have been a bit of a mixed blessing, as he certainly got his grapes ripe in this year, as he picked very, very late, but the result was that his 1999 Extra Brut Millésime bottling came in at a rather remarkable (particularly for Champagne!) alcohol level of 14.2 percent. Additionally, he used no SO₂ during the *elevage* or bottling for this wine, which combined with the ripeness of the grapes would make one expect that it would not be a great candidate for the cellar, and yet the wine still has several years of life in it. I have drunk the wine on two occasions, with the second magnum performing far better than the first (perhaps a result of the no sulfur regimen?). This is the note from the superior magnum, which was tasted in 2016. The 1999 Blanc de Blancs from Anselme Selosse is drinking at its apogee at age seventeen, but still has plenty still to give down the road. The bouquet offers up a mature and impressively complex blend of baked apple, peach, sweet almonds, a lovely base of chalky minerality, brioche, a touch of orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovey core, pinpoint bubbles and very good length and grip on the vibrant and classy finish. It carries its rather high octane very well and shows no signs of heat or clumsiness from its rather dazzling level of ripeness in this vintage. 2016-2030. **94.**

Guillaume Selosse Bottlings

Blanc de Blancs “Au Dessus du Gros Mont” Extra Brut NV- Guillaume Selosse (Cramant)

This bottling of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs from Guillaume Selosse hails from the *lieu à dit* of “Au Dessus du Gros Mont” in the village of Cramant. The vines for this bottling are seventy years of age and it was disgorged in July of 2015, with a finishing dosage of 1.5 grams per liter. This is the inaugural release of the wine, which is from the base year of 2009, with a reserve of 2008 blended in. The wine is excellent and showing quite mature at the present time, offering up a complex nose of baked apple, walnuts, a fine base of chalky minerality, just a touch of buttery oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite classy in profile, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive, elegant mousse and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is drinking with great style now, but still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2019-2045+. **93.**

Champagne Jacques Selosse Lieux à Dits Bottlings- Primarily Pinot Noir-Based

As I noted in the introduction to the various cuvées produced by Anselme and Guillaume Selosse these days, La Côte Faron in Aÿ was one of the first two of the single vineyard wines to be released back in 2010, and at that time, it was probably the most complete example of what the entire range in the series will one day look like stylistically, as Anselme Selosse had bought his parcel of vines here in 1994 and started a solera for the wine right from the first vintage. So, by the time the 2003 base year version of La Côte Faron was being released, it included reserve wines all the way back to 1994. La Côte Faron is a tiny *lieu à dit*, which sits very high up on the slope on the northeastern edge of Aÿ, where Mareuil and Mutigny converge with the village limits, and it is a very steep slope. The Selosses’ vineyard parcel of Le Bout du Clos in Ambonnay, which to reiterate, is planted to a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, is situated on the western edge of the village limits, not far from Bouzy, and it is not particularly high up on the slope, but lower down and nearer the town center. The *lieu à dit* of La Châtelaine lies just to its west and is the only Ambonnay-based vineyard between Le

Bout du Clos and Bouzy. Anselme and Guillaume Selsosse co-ferment the pinot noir and the chardonnay for this bottling. Sous le Mont in Mareuil lies up on a hill just behind Clos des Goisses, to the east of the town center and looking directly out over les Goisses at the Marne River and canal. It faces a bit more southeasterly than the Clos des Goisses between it and the river, and hence receives a nice dose of morning sun.

Le Bout du Clos Extra Brut NV (Ambonnay)- Champagne Selsosse (Base Year 2005)

While the *lieu à dit* bottling from Ambonnay, the Le Bout du Clos is principally a pinot noir cuvée, the parcel used by Monsieur Selsosse actually includes twenty percent chardonnay as well, which was vinified together with the pinot noir to produce this stunning wine. The wine is from the base year of 2005 and was the second commercial release of this bottling; it was disgorged in April of 2012. The brilliantly complex bouquet soars from the glass in a blend of apple, white peach, a touch of tangerine, kaleidoscopic minerality, a touch of warm bread, and floral tones redolent of peonies. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly refined, with a great core, magical complexity, elegant *mousse* and a very, very long and stunning finish. This is one of the greatest wines I have ever had the pleasure to taste from Anselme Selsosse! 2013-2030. **97.**

La Côte Faron Extra Brut NV (Aÿ)- Champagne Jacques Selsosse (Base Year 2005)

La Côte Faron was one of the first two of the *lieux à dits* bottlings to be released by Anselme Selsosse, as he first produced this wine from the 2003 vintage and released it in 2010. So this bottling, from the 2005 vintage, is the third in the series from La Côte Faron and is an absolutely beautiful bottle of bubbly. The *cépages* is one hundred percent pinot noir, and the wine was aged six years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement in April of 2012. The bouquet is a beautiful blend of white peach, smoke, bread dough, dried flowers and a beautifully complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and an utterly refined example of Aÿ fruit (wines from this village can sometimes be a bit more broad-shouldered in style, without quite this same elegance), with a lovely core of fruit, crisp acids, delicate *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the focused and beautifully complex finish. This is already drinking marvelously well, but should age long and gracefully. 2013-2030. **94.**

Sous Le Mont Extra Brut NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)- Jacques Selsosse (Base Year 2009)

This is the bottle that Anselme Selsosse generously handed off to me when I was at his hotel in Avize in March of 2018, suffering from the flu. It made me feel better immediately, though I did not get around to opening it until the following November! As it was disgorged in January of 2017, it is from the base year of 2009, which was not one of Monsieur Selsosse's favorite for this bottling. Despite his lack of enthusiasm for the torrid growing season of 2009, he has crafted a beautiful wine from this lovely *terroir*, with the wine offering up a deep and absolutely superb nose of peach, apple, beautiful, sweet walnut tones, *patissière*, a complex base of soil, gently buttery oak tones, a bit of smokiness and an exotic topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very complex, with a fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse* and a long, vibrant and very classy finish. This is vibrant and zesty and shows none of the signs of overt plumpness that Monsieur Selsosse inferred were the characteristics of this wine in 2009! 2018-2050. **95+.**

Sous Le Mont Extra Brut NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)- Jacques Selosse (Base Year 2007)

This wine had only been disgorged five weeks before my visit to the cellars in spring of 2014, so I have scored it in a range, as it was still difficult to see if it was only going to be stellar, or if its destiny was even higher! This bottling from the Sous Le Mont vineyard was from the base year of 2007, and as the first release of this was from 2003, it means that its reserve “solera” now has four vintages with which to work. Readers may recall from last year’s notes on the domaine, the vineyard lies in the village of Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, on the same hillside as Clos des Goisses, with Sous Le Mont on the east-facing side of the hill, where it receives the morning sun. There is a strong vein of magnesium in the soil here, which lends a nice sense of youthful reserve to the wine and, to Monsieur Selosse’s mind, truly defines this *terroir*. The superb and youthful nose offers up scents of white cherries, apple, plenty of smokiness, a great base of chalky minerality and gentle notes of bread dough in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovey core, great mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and stunning length and grip on the focused and racy finish. This is going to be great wine! 2017-2035+. **95-96+**.

Sous Le Mont Extra Brut NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)- Jacques Selosse (Base Year 2005)

This release of the Sous Le Mont, single vineyard bottling from Anselme Selosse is from the base year of 2005 and was the first official release of this bottling. The wine is flat out delicious, offering up a nose that shows just a whisper of oak in its mélange of tart orange, quince, smoky overtones, a touch of lavender and a brilliant base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and the most powerfully-styled of these three pinot noir-based bottlings, with a superb core, crisp acids, delicate bubbles and outstanding length and grip on the focused finish. This really could use a few years’-worth of bottle age to blossom from behind its structural elements- it will be outstanding. 2015-2030+. **93**.

Sous Le Mont Extra Brut NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)- Jacques Selosse (Base Year 2003)

This example of Sous le Mont is from the base year of 2003, so this predated the “official” release of this wine from the base year of 2005 and was tasted in the cellars in Avize during my visit in March of 2014. It was made from the first year that Monsieur Selosse owned this parcel outright and he noted that this wine only has 4.5 grams per liter of acidity, due to the very hot summer. It was disgorged in 2009. Nonetheless, despite the low acids of 2003, the wine is superb, though it is a bit more deeply-pitched in aromatics and flavors than the 2007 base wine version. The bouquet offers up a lovely nose of peach, pear, chalky minerality (the ridge that houses Clos des Goisses and Sous le Mont is really a profound outcropping of limestone), smoke and brioche. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with superb cut and grip (particularly for its relatively low acidity), pinpoint bubbles and fine focus on the long and well-balanced finish. This wine is drinking beautifully, but will have no trouble holding another fifteen or twenty years! 2014-2030. **93**.

Sous Le Mont Extra Brut NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)- Jacques Selosse (Base Year 2002)

The base wine on this beauty is the superb 2002 vintage, and the wine is absolutely brilliant. It was disgorged sometime in 2008. The deep, pure and utterly classic nose soars from the glass in a smoky blaze of white peach, gentle tangerine, warm biscuits, chalky minerality, discreet white flowers and the aforementioned smokiness in abundance. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and still strikingly young, with a great core, elegant *mousse*, and outstanding cut and grip on the very, very long, mineral bath of a finish. There is a vibrancy to the expression of *terroir* here that is otherworldly! This wine is certainly approachable today (I sincerely doubt I spit it on this morning), but it is still relatively primary in profile and five or six

more years in the cellar are really going to work their magic on this utterly profound young wine. 2020-2060. **98.**

Sous Le Mont Extra Brut NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)- Jacques Selosse (Base Year 1999)

This particular bottling of Sous le Mont from Monsieur Selosse was disgorged in 2005 and is from the base year of 1999, which was a very ripe year in Champagne, and the wine tips the scales at an unheard of (at least in my experience) 14.2 percent alcohol! Monsieur Selosse asked us to guess the alcohol, and knowing that this was a ripe vintage, I guessed 13.2 percent, which would make it more than a point higher than most bottles of Champagne- but I was a full percent too low! In any event, the wine is beautiful and shows no signs of its extraordinary ripeness, as it offers up an aromatic constellation of fresh apricot, pear, toasted almonds, a beautifully complex base of soil, fresh nutmeg, brioche, a bit of vanillin oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, great focus and a very long, classy and wide open finish that closes with superb grip and minerality. Great juice. 2014-2025+. **94.**



Champagne Jacques Selosse Lieux à Dits Bottlings- Chardonnay-Based

Of the three single vineyard Blanc de Blancs bottlings now produced by Anselme and Guillaume Selosse, the les Chantereines parcel in Avize has been in the family the longest, as Jacques Selosse first bought vines in this *lieu à dit* in 1960. It is one of the great vineyards in the grand cru of Avize and, as I mentioned above, Anselme Selosse purchased another plot of vines here in the lead up to his starting to include this vineyard in his single vineyard lineup, as the production from this *climat* also features prominently in both his Cuvée Substance and his vintage-dated bottlings. The vineyard is very steep, very chalky and has an easterly exposition

and enjoys the morning sun. It is located on the northern edge of Avize. The Cramant single vineyard bottling of Le Chemin de Châlons hails from a vineyard that has a plain southerly exposition. Le Chemin de Châlons is situated in the far southeastern corner of Cramant, on the communal boundary with Avize, so it is only a hundred meters from Les Chantereines. In Mesnil-sur-Oger sits the third single vineyard bottling from Messieurs Seloise, Les Carelles. This is essentially an undulating ridge top, right to the west and high above of the town center of Mesnil, with its exposition ranging from directly east to due south, so there is a mix of both morning and afternoon sun, depending on exactly where the vines are located along the curve of the slope.

Les Chantereines Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV- Champagne Seloise (Base Year 2004)

This note was taken in the summer of 2013 and is for the first release of Les Chantereines as a single vineyard bottling and is from the base year of 2004. At the time, it was showing a bit more new oaky on the nose than any of the other *lieux à dits* (the tasting features all six, side by side), offering up scents of pear, almond, warm bread, a complex, chalky base of soil, gentle smokiness and a youthful touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine *mousse*, lovely focus and balance, crisp acids and a nice touch of nuttiness adding dimension on the long finish. This is a lovely wine that only scores a tad lower than the above because of the extra touch of oak on the nose- though this may dissipate with bottle age. 2013-2025+. **93.**

Le Chemin de Châlons Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut- Champagne Seloise (Base Year 2006)

The bottling of Le Chemin de Châlons that we tasted was base year 2006, so the wine was disgorged sometime in 2012, but the fast pace of the conversation kept me from getting the precise month of its *dégorgement* (this was tasted in the cellars with Monsieur Seloise in 2014). The Le Chemin de Châlons (2006 base wine) is absolutely stunning, soaring from the glass in a complex and utterly pure mélange of pear, lemon blossoms, kaleidoscopic chalky minerality, incipient notes of *crème patissière*, smoke and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very deep at the core, with racy acids, stunning backend minerality, great focus and balance, refined *mousse* and brilliant length and grip on the seamless and electric finish. Pretty good juice. 2014-2035+. **96.**

Le Chemin de Châlons Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut- Champagne Seloise (Base Year 2004)

This note is from the inaugural release of Le Chemin de Châlons, which hailed from the base year of 2004 and purportedly also included reserve wines from the previous two vintages. The wine was tasted at the unveiling dinner organized by The Rare Wine Company back in the summer of 2013 and is absolutely lovely on both the nose and palate. The beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, chalky soil tones, *crème patissière*, a gently base of oak and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with a great core of fruit, stunning focus, nascent complexity, pinpoint bubbles and simply superb length and grip on the bright and highly-nuanced finish. This is another absolute showstopper, but give it a few years to unwind structurally before having at it in earnest. 2016-2030+. **94+.**

Les Carelles Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV- Champagne Seloise (Base Year 2008)

This most recent bottle of Les Carelles Blanc de Blancs was disgorged in February of 2016 and would have hailed from the base year of 2008, though, of course, now with a solera of

reserve wines included dating back to either 2004 or 2002. It is drinking brilliantly today, but it is still in climbing mode and will be even better with another four or five years in the cellar. Today, the wine delivers a superb aromatic constellation of pear, apple, hazelnut, a very complex base of chalky soil tones, a touch of *crème patissière*, a deft foundation of buttery oak and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully structured, with a rock solid core of fruit, superb focus and grip, refined *mousse* and a very long, very pure and vibrant finish. Outstanding juice. 2019-2060. **95.**

Les Carelles Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV- Champagne Selsosse (Base Year 2004)

Les Carelles sweeps along a hillside, with its exposition swinging from due east to due south, so it gets a lovely blend of morning and afternoon sun over the course of the day. The Champagne Selsosse bottling from this vineyard is absolutely stunning and my favorite of this series of chardonnay-based cuvées on this day (by a small margin!), as it offers up a brilliant bouquet of pear, apple, a touch of walnut, plenty of smokiness, orange peel, wonderfully complex minerality, a bit of nutskin and a gentle base of buttery new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very soil-driven in personality, with a great core, zesty acids, elegant *mousse* and stunning length and grip on the focused and dancing finish. This was the third release of this cuvée, from the base year of 2005. A gorgeous bottle of bubbly! 2013-2030+. **95.**

Il Etait un Fois Blanc de Blancs Oloroso-Styled NV

Il Etait un Fois Blanc de Blancs Oloroso-Styled NV- Champagne Jacques Selsosse

Monsieur Selsosse is still always experimenting in the cellars, and here was something that one does not encounter too often in the Champagne region, a bottling of still wine made from chardonnay from Avize, made in the style of an Oloroso sherry! The wine is really beautiful, wafting from the glass in a blend of apricot, sweet nutty tones, orange blossoms, chalky soil and a bit of citrus peel from the *flora*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and fairly sweet- a demi-sec if you will- with a fine core, lovely acidity and focus and a very long, salty finish. This is really good! 2014-2030+. **94.**

**NEW RELEASES AND OLD FAVORITES
FROM AMERICA'S OLD SCHOOL AND NEO-CLASSICISTS**



I always look forward to the summer installment on my bi-annual report on Neo-Classical American wines, as a great many of my favorite producers have new releases coming into the market at this time. Though my enthusiasm leading into the article was as robust as ever, a lot of the new releases coming out are now from the 2017 vintage, and I wondered how many estates would handle the blazing heat that descended on much of the west coast's finest wine-producing regions during the Labor Day weekend at the start of September of that year. The heat sent temperatures soaring in the vineyards and it was a very difficult passage to navigate for wineries, as the red grapes were not yet ripe and the temperatures played havoc with the ripening process and often, scorched exposed grape bunches during the heat spike. Temperatures were truly brutal during the heat wave, topping out in the Sonoma County towns of Healdsburg at 112 degrees Fahrenheit and 110 degrees in Santa Rosa- temperatures where the grapevines shut down and simply try to survive. As the month of August of 2017 has been cool and often quite foggy leading into the heat spike, sugar levels were hardly robust when the heat arrived and most of the red grape varieties were still several weeks away from maturity. For those producers who might have pulled some leaves to hasten along the ripening process of the skins, their bunches were

often badly sunburnt as a result of the Labor Day roasting, so that careful selection became a key to producing a high quality wine in the aftermath of that early September heat spike.

While the blazing heat of Labor Day weekend of 2017 caused complications for the vintage, it was not necessarily a catastrophe, and many producers, either by luck, foresight or a judicious combination of the two were able to navigate through the difficulties and ended up producing truly beautiful wines from the vintage. When temperatures get as high as those that Labor Day weekend, the vines have to shut down to survive, and it is often imperative that they be watered leading into the heat so that they can get through the periods of the most extreme temperatures. The plants make no attempts at photosynthesis at such high temps, simply going into dormancy and trying to protect their foliage. If they are not watered leading into the heat, the plants will pull back water out of the grape bunches to survive, which is why it is often necessary to irrigate the vineyards ahead of the such an extreme heat spike, so that the bunches are not compromised. But, as Kevin Harvey of Rhys Vineyards noted when discussing his pinot noir crop, the results of the heat spike varied dramatically from parcel to parcel and were not at all what might have been expected, as “rather than ripening quickly, the Pinot Noir vines actually went into a sort of hibernation and did not progress for almost two weeks after the spike.” He continued, “additionally the sugar levels are actually on the low side with normal acidity,” which was completely counterintuitive of what had been expected from such scorching heat leading into the harvest.

Needless to say, as the effects of the very high temperatures varied from vineyard to vineyard and from grape variety to grape variety, the vintage has produced a wide stylistic lens. Some chardonnay was already to be harvested leading into the heat spike, and the earliest maturing parcels of this grape came in with fortuitous timing. For the chardonnay that was not quite ready out on the vines (often from either cooler microclimates or from parcels with higher croploads), the results of the heat varied dramatically. Some parcels with larger croploads had already had their leaves pulled to try and expose the grapes to more sun, and this was a disaster, as the skins were badly sunburned in the blazing Labor Day sun. Other parcels dehydrated down to raisins if the vines had not been irrigated to protect the plants and bunches leading into that torrid weekend. In different blocks, where there was adequate shade to protect the bunches and enough water reserves to keep the plants from pulling water out of the bunches, the vines weathered the blast of high temperatures and ended up producing very good fruit. But, the crop was hardly homogenous after the heat wave and one had to be careful about selection even in the vineyards that had done the best in weathering the storm. As Sean Castorani of Model Farm in Sonoma commented about harvesting grapes for his syrah bottling (which has turned out superbly well), “we made the decision to slow down and pick the fruit ourselves over multiple days,” focusing “on evaluating each cluster in the field” and “carefully choosing for quality and integrity.” This produced a smaller crop, as anything substandard had to be discarded, but as he notes, “the resulting wine is a window to the vintage as a whole, rather than being defined by a singular event” of the heat spike of Labor Day.

In the wake of the Labor Day blast of extremely high heat, some producers rushed to bring in their crops, even though the bunches may not have accumulated ideal sugar levels or ripened up their skins completely. Others just lost significant percentages of their crop, due to sunburn, dehydration of the bunches or other heat-related ailments. In some of the more damaged

vineyards, the goal I am sure was just to bring in what survived and see what could be done in the cellars to make a decent wine, despite the challenges of the heat. But, in the more fortunate blocks of vines, often the grapes were not yet ready for picking right after the Labor Day scorcher and it took a while for the vines to recover from the shock of the heat and start to ripen up bunches again. If producers were patient, the season got rolling again nicely after Labor Day and many vineyards were able to produce really good quality fruit, and often without particularly high sugar levels, as at least the blazing temperatures had not sent sugars soaring uncontrollably at the start of September, as all the vines shut down in self-preservation mode during the worst of the heat. For those that waited until the vines emerged again from their period of dormancy and ripened up the crop nicely, and then were careful about only keeping the best bunches to make their wines, the results are some truly beautiful wines, often with quite forward fruit tones, coupled to fairly moderate alcohols and surprisingly good acids. Not what one would intuitively have expected from the climactic roller coaster brought about by that heat spike.

In Oregon and Washington, the growing season of 2017 will be remembered best in parts of wine country by the wildfires that plagued the two states for much of the summer. In Oregon, it was the southern AVAs of Applegate Valley and Rogue Valley, as well across the state line in Washington in the Columbia Gorge that suffered most from the smoke. The skies were grey with smoke for much of the months of July and August, slowing down ripening, but rains at the end of August and early September finally cleared the smoke from the skies and a fine Indian Summer allowed the grapes to ripen up properly and the vintage as a whole seems to have turned out very well- at least from the producers whose 2017s I have tasted so far. Smoke taint in the 2017s from these growing areas seems to have been fairly minimal, due to the grapes not yet having turned color on the vines during most of the smoky period, and it will not be a replication of the smoky wines that came out of many California vineyards during their horrible battle with wildfires a few years back. In the Willamette Valley, fires were further away and the only real effect of the wildfires was in the grey, smoky skies, which slowed down maturation, but the *fin de saison* delivered excellent weather and the grapes ripened up beautifully in time for a much later harvest than had been the case the previous three years in this section of Oregon.

As I noted in my last report on neo-classical and old school producers in the US, back in February, one of the wineries for me whose wines really showed beautifully again was Seth Long's Morgen Long Vineyards in Willamette Valley. As I noted at the time, Seth is only producing chardonnay, and the 2017 vintage will be his first where he really has enough wine to sell to make his bottlings more widely available. I have now had the full range of the 2017s (they are reported on below) and do urge readers to hunt down some of these superb chardonnays while they are in the market, as they are beautifully made and seem really built to last well in the cellar. Fans of the style of Jean-Marc Roulot in Meursault will certainly like what Seth Long is doing in the Willamette Valley! There are several other wineries in this report whose wines were new to me and showed quite well, including Adam Lee's Clarice Wine Company bottlings, Brett Hogan's Côte West, Paul de Lancellotti's excellent Oregon wines, Nicole Walsh's Ser Winery in the Santa Cruz Mountain foothills (though I would really love to see them bottled under natural corks!) and the Howard family's Big Basin winery in the Santa Cruz and Gabilan Mountains. All of these producers are doing great things and very much merit adding to your cellar. There are also a few winegrowers whose excellent wines have appeared in these pages for a few years now, but still remain below the radar and deserve to be tried if you have not yet already done so.

These include Jan Schulte-Bisping lovely wines from Ontario's North 42 Degrees Winery (his Bordeaux varietal bottlings are more old school than plenty of today's châteaux in the Médoc!), Stewart Johnson's truly exceptional wines at Kendric Vineyards in Marin County, the whole lineup at Alex Davis' Porter Creek Vineyards in the Russian River Valley, and Andrew Tow's wines at The Withers. Andrew's current releases made from Rhône varieties may be his best yet of this genre (which he has been specializing in since day one) and clearly rank up there with the very best of this category in California today! None of these estates are currently household names in the world of North American wines, but they all deserve to be.

Beyond these fine producers, this report is chock full of notes on wines from some of the most illustrious and well-known classical producers in America today, including Cathy Corison, Philip Togni, Jim Anderson at Patricia Green Cellars (who sent a fine representative range of his outstanding 2017s, but certainly all, as there are an amazingly wide variety of different pinot noir bottlings here) and Brian O'Donnell's Belle Pente Vineyard's current lineup of pinot noirs. Also found below are notes on the new releases from old favorites such as Edmunds St. John, Rhys Vineyards, Stony Hill Vineyards and Mount Eden Vineyards (make sure you find some bottles of both their 2015 Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, which are stellar!), so there is plenty of highly recommended wines currently in the market that are reported on below. I should note that the field is getting even wider for top flight wines made in North America these days, and one can look far beyond the usual suspects of cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay and pinot noir to find some of the greatest wines that our continent has to offer. At the top of my red wine list is, of course, Syrah, as the classically styled examples of this varietal being made here today are flat out stunning, but superb examples of Gamay, Grenache, Cunoise, Graciano, Carignane and now, even Mencía can be found from US producers today (Steven Thompson's Analemma bottling is stellar). I almost forgot Zinfandel, which in the hands of producers such as Sky Vineyards, Joseph Swan Vineyards and Doug Nalle remains a truly great wine. I had intended to spread the net even a bit wider for this report, but my father's health intervened and I did not reach out to several more wineries and distributors who have a great lineup of classically-styled American wines. In hindsight, this was probably a good thing, as when all of the samples I had piled up in the cellar were finally tasted and written up, this report was already more than forty-five pages in length! So, the wineries I could not get to for this article will form a very solid foundation for the next iteration of this report, and hopefully folks will be able to soldier through the following lineup of tasting notes at its current length, as there are truly some beautiful, beautiful wines featured in the pages that follow!

Rosé

2018 Rosé of Cunoise "Mounts Vineyard"- Côte West (Dry Creek Valley)

Côte West is a small winery based in Oakland, which sources grapes from a variety of different vineyards in the top north coast AVAs of California. Brett Hogan studied winemaking and viticulture and got his Masers at UC-Davis (his undergraduate degrees are in Economics and French Literature from Notre Dame); Brett did his *stages* post-graduation at both Stag's Leap Wine Cellars and with Dominique Lafon of Domaine Comtes Lafon in Meursault. He and his wife Kerrie co-direct the winery, while taking care of their two young children. I had never tasted the wines from Côte West prior to this group of samples arriving and was quite impressed with what I tried. The 2018 Rosé of Cunoise from Côte West comes in at a cool 12.6 percent octane and offers up a vibrant bouquet of melon, strawberry, salty soil tones and a topnote of

dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and nicely balanced, with a good core, fine focus and grip and just a tickle of spritz on the long finish. This is quite svelte and works very well at the table. 2019-2024. **89.**

2018 Rosé of Grenache- Côte West (Clarksburg)

Brett Hogan picked his grenache very early for his Rosé, with the wine coming in at 12.5 percent octane. It is quite pale for a Rosé (more onion skin than salmon in hue) and delivers a bright and fairly complex nose of gooseberry, white flowers, a touch of turmeric, sandy soil tones and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and focused, with a lovely mix of flavors that hint at savory, good acid and very good balance on the long and classy finish. Good juice. 2019-2024. **89.**

2018 Rosé of Zinfandel “Del Barba Vineyard”- Côte West (Contra Costa County)

The 2018 Rosé of Zinfandel “Del Barba Vineyard” from Côte West has the deepest salmon color of these three lovely Rosés, but it is still a fairly pale wine. It is also the ripest of the three bottlings, coming in at 13.3 percent octane and shows off a bright bouquet of melon, rhubarb, a hint of spice tones, a nice dollop of soil and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is crisp, quite full-bodied and fairly vinous in style, with plenty of mid-palate depth, good focus and balance and a long, ripe finish. This is quite well made, but I prefer the inherent delicacy and better bounce of both the Cunoise and Grenache Rosés from Brett Hogan in this vintage. 2019-2023. **87.**

2018 Rosé of Pinot Noir “Petaluma Gap”- Kendric Vineyards (Marin County)

The 2018 Rosé of Pinot Noir from Kendric Vineyards is beautifully low octane, coming in at a cool 12.2 percent and is a lovely salmon color. The wine offers up a fine nose of watermelon, tangerine, gentle spice tones, salty soil elements and a discreetly floral topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and vibrant, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine focus and grip and a long, bouncy and quite tasty finish. This is my kind of Rosé! 2019-2022. **89.**

2018 Rosé of Cabernet Sauvignon- North 42 Degrees Winery (Lake Erie North Shore)

The 2018 Rosé of Cabernet Sauvignon from North 42 Degrees is fairly dark salmon in color and comes in at 12.5 percent octane. The wine offers up a very pretty nose that reminds me of a Loire Valley Anjou Rosé, delivering scents of cherries, melon, a nice touch of soil, cherry skin and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with sound acids, just a whisper of spritz on the long and focused finish. This is an excellent Rosé for the table. 2019-2024. **88.**

2018 Rosé of Cabernet Pfeffer “Wirz Vineyard”- Ser Winery

The 2018 Rosé of Cabernet Pfeffer from the “Wirz Vineyard” bottled by Nicole Walsh is one of the palest rosés I have seen in a while, with just a faint blush of copper to it. The wine is produced from the same ninety-five year-old vines that produce the red wine varietal reported on below, and Nicole ferments it with indigenous yeasts and raises it in stainless steel. The wine offers up a bright bouquet of quince, a touch of citrus peel, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and just a whisper of some faint savory essence. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, vibrant and reasonably bouncy, with a good core of fruit, moderate acids and good length on the focused finish. This is not overly crisp, but it is long and complex and works very nicely at the table. Like all of Nicole’s wines, it is sealed under screwcap. 2019-2020. **87.**

2018 Rosé- The Withers (El Dorado)

The 2018 Rosé from The Withers is composed of a blend of fifty-eight percent grenache, forty percent mourvèdre and two percent cinsault. It was barrel-fermented in old casks with indigenous yeasts and malo was blocked after about thirty percent was completed. It is a pale,

copper-salmon color and offers up a very pretty bouquet of casaba melon, tangerine gently musky floral tones, a touch of coriander seed and a nice base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nicely vinous in style, with a good core, fine balance and grip and good framing acids to keep it light on its feet for the next couple of years. This is a very food-friendly, succulent and well-made Rosé. 2019-2022. **89.**

2017 Rosé “Mosier Hills Estate”- Analemma (Columbia Gorge)

The 2017 Rosé from Analemma is composed entirely of grenache, with the grapes harvested early so that the finished wine could come in at 12.5 percent octane. After a short maceration on the skins to give the wine its fairly deep salmon color, it was aged six months in older oak barrels. The wine offers up a good nose of melon, a touch of rhubarb, a bit of coriander seed, a good base of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely vinous in style, with a good core, a nice dollop of soil tones, sound framing acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is definitely a food Rosé and would be really fine with a wide array of different cuisine options. Good juice. 2019-2021. **88.**

2017 White Pinot Noir- Franny Beck Vineyards (Willamette Valley)

I suppose that this lovely wine is not really a Rosé, as there was no skin contact and the wine is really more “white” than “rosé”, but I did not know where else to list it in this report. As readers know, I am a big admirer of Michael Sterling’s excellent pinot noirs, so it is not that surprising that this would carry over to this unique white pinot bottling! The wine offers up a complex nose of peach, musky floral tones, a lovely base of salty soil, a touch of fruit skin and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and focused, with a lovely core, good transparency and grip, sound framing acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is very tasty on the attack and really has impressive backend intensity. I have never had a wine like this previously and would love to drink an entire bottle over the course of a meal! 2019-2024. **90.**

Sauvignon and Chenin Blanc

2018 Sauvignon Blanc “Pine Mountain- Cloverdale Peak”- Côte West (Sonoma County)

The 2018 Sauvignon Blanc from Côte West hails from a vineyard planted at 2800 feet above sea level on volcanic soils on the extreme northern edge of Sonoma County. Incidentally, it was the only wine from Brett Hogan that I received to sample that was sealed under a screwcap, which was too bad, as it was already showing a bit “pinched” from its closure on the backend, though had not yet developed any off aromas or flavors from reduction. The bouquet is very pretty, offering up the classic varietal mix of lime, green apple, fresh-cut grass, a nice dollop of soil and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with good depth at the core, fine acids and grip and a long, balanced and classy finish (if one ignores the slightly restricted backend texture from the screwcap). I fear this wine is going to fall prey to reduction over the coming couple of years, so plan on drinking it early on. This is a first class example of sauvignon blanc that deserves the respect of a proper cork- even all three Rosés I tasted from Brett were sealed under natural cork! 2018-2020+? **88.**

2018 Sauvignon Blanc “Estate Vineyard”- Patricia Green Cellars (Ribbon Ridge)

Patricia Green Cellars has the oldest parcel of sauvignon blanc vines planted in Oregon. Jim Anderson takes this old vine fruit and raises the wine in older, acacia wood puncheons to give the wine a unique personality twist that works gorgeously with the varietal. His 2018 Sauvignon Blanc “Estate Vineyard” bottling is pretty ripe, coming in at 13.7 percent octane, but

fresh and vibrant in the mouth and offers up a beautifully fruit-driven (no grassiness driving the bus here!) bouquet of lime, fresh pineapple, tangerine, salty soil tones, lime blossoms and just a whisper of the varietal's fresh-cut grass botanicals. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a fine core, lovely transparency and very good length and grip on the ripe, but bouncy and balanced finish. This is a lovely wine- albeit, not with quite as much grassiness as I like in my examples of sauvignon blanc, but I am sure that there are plenty of folks out there with lower tolerance to pyrazines that will be absolutely thrilled with the style of this very well-made bottling! 2019-2025. **92.**

2017 Chenin Blanc “Mount Pajaro Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2017 Mount Pajaro Vineyard bottling of Chenin Blanc from Rhys Vineyards is a more forward wine than last year's version, with lovely plumpness to the fruit component, a fine base of soil and still the fine structural chassis of chenin blanc. The bouquet delivers a classic varietal blend of ripe quince, a touch of pineapple, lanolin, lovely soil tones, a wisp of bee pollen and a topnote of white flowers. With a bit of air an exotic touch of bergamot also develops in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and juicy on the attack, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Part of the reason for this wine's greater personality out of the blocks *vis à vis* the 2016 version is the style of the two vintages, but I have the impression that the 2017 also marks a step of progression for the team at Rhys with this varietal and vineyard. Fine, fine juice. 2019-2040+. **91+.**

Riesling and Gewurztraminer

2018 Riesling- North 42 Degrees Winery (Lake Eerie North Shore) Screwcap

The 2018 regular bottling of dry Riesling from Jan Schulte-Bisping comes in at a cool and quite Germanic 11.5 percent octane (Germany is, of course, Jan's country of origin) and offers up lovely complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a fine blend apple, a hint of honeycomb, good soil tones, dried flowers and a slightly woody element that reminds me a bit of a summer meadow. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and nicely balanced, with sound framing acids, a good core and fine length and grip on the moderately complex finish. This is a tasty bottle, but it obviously does not possess the same complexity and breed of the Reserve bottling. 2019-2025. **87.**

2018 Sweet Riesling- North 42 Degrees Winery (Lake Eerie North Shore) Screwcap

The 2018 Sweet Riesling from North 42 Degrees comes in at ten percent alcohol and offers up Spätlese level of sweetness on the palate, along with a nice touch of CO2 on the palate that perks the wine up very nicely and gives it vibrancy and bounce. The bouquet is a lovely blend of apple, white peach, bee pollen, spring flowers and a nice touch of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and bouncy, with lovely intensity of flavor, a beguiling lightness of step and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. I really like the style of this bottling this year! 2019-2030. **90.**

2018 Riesling Reserve “Late Harvest Dry”- North 42 Degrees Winery (Lake Eerie N.S.)

The 2018 Riesling Reserve from North 42 Degrees is a far more serious example than the regular bottling, and also quite a bit riper, as this comes in at 13.6 percent octane and carries five grams per liter of residual sugar. The nose is quite Alsace-like to my mind, offering up scents of apple, nectarine, a touch of petrol, a dollop of honeycomb, citrus peel, lovely soil tones and a hint of almost Rangen de Thann-like rosemary overtones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and quite dry in personality, with an excellent core of fruit, nascent complexity

and very good grip on the long and promising finish. Stylistically, this is like the old Vendanges Tardives Rieslings of the 1980s in Alsace that were finished very much drier than what we see today in the wake of global warming there. This is an excellent wine. 2019-2035+. **92.**

2017 Dry Riesling “Wirz Vineyard”- Ser Winery (Cienega Valley)

The 2017 Dry Riesling bottling from Nicole Walsh is produced from the Wirz Vineyard’s seventy year-old riesling grapes. They are planted on limestone and decomposed granite, dry-farmed and Nicole ferments them with indigenous yeasts and raises the wine in stainless steel. The 2017 version comes in at thirteen percent octane and is a bit reductive when first poured (this is sealed under screwcap), but with some aeration, it eventually offers up complex nose of lemon, apple, a touch of petrol, gentle notes of beeswax, chalky minerality and a gentle topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a good core, lovely mineral drive, sound acids and fine focus and balance on the fairly long finish. There is just a whisper today of vegetal tones starting to poke out on the backend, which I assume is from the closure. Right now, all this wine needs is a bit of decanting to get it to open up, but I would be hesitant about aging it too long under its screwcap, as the first touches of reduction are already starting to lock in here. That said, with some time in decanter, it is a tasty wine at the present time. I wish it was under natural cork. 2019-2021+? **88.**

2017 Gewurztraminer- Stony Hill Vineyards (Spring Mountain District)

The 2017 Gewurztraminer from Stony Hill comes in at a cool twelve percent octane and was finished completely dry. The wine delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of pear, lychee nut, rose petals, white soil elements and just a whisper of upper register spice tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and beautifully light on its feet, with good focus and grip, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex finish. In the classic Stony Hill style, this is still a young wine and will blossom nicely over the coming half decade and last much longer. 2019-2045. **90+.**

2017 White Riesling- Stony Hill Vineyards (Napa Valley)

Stony Hill’s Riesling is quite dry, with less than one gram per liter of residual sugar, but also delicately styled and only tips the scales at 11.5 percent alcohol in the 2017 vintage. This bottling has a fine track record for aging and always starts out life understated and this is again the case with this lovely 2017, delivering a youthful bouquet of apple, citrus blossoms, chamomile, salty soil tones and a lovely touch of spice. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and still fairly tightly-knit, with lovey intensity of flavor, bright acids, good mineral drive and lift and a long, promising and still fairly primary finish. This is certainly approachable today, but it is still a puppy and I would tuck it away in the cellar for four or five years before really thinking about drinking it in earnest, just to let those secondary layers of complexity start to emerge. 2019-2045. **91.**

2016 Sparkling Riesling “Wirz Vineyard”- Ser Winery (Cienega Valley)

The Sparkling Riesling from Nicole Walsh comes sealed under a crown cap and was fermented quite dry, as its octane twelve percent. It was fermented in the bottle like Champagne and received no *dosage*. The wine offers up a very pretty bouquet of apple, a hint of strawberry, lime zest, lovely minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and fine backend mineral drive on the bone dry finish. To my palate, I would have liked just a touch of *dosage* on the backend, as this comes across as slightly austere today on the finish. But, then, I am a Brut, rather than a Brut

Nature guy in most circumstances! The wine is quite well made and tasty, and if no *dosage* is right up your alley, it will not disappoint and my score will seem a couple of points stingy. 2019-2030+. **87**.



Chardonnay grapes ready for harvest in a vineyard in Napa Valley.

Chardonnay

2018 Chardonnay- North 42 Degrees Winery (Lake Erie North Shore- Ontario)

The 2018 Chardonnay from North 42 Degrees includes thirty percent of the blend that went through malo, while seventy percent did not see malolactic fermentation. The wine saw no oak during its *elevage* and comes in at 12.5 percent octane. The wine offers up a fine nose of lemon, pear, gently musky floral tones and a fine base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and nicely generous on the attack, with a good core and a long, juicy and fairly complex finish. The acids here are not particularly high, so I would opt to drink it on the early side. Stylistically, this reminds me of a very good Mâconnais bottling. Good juice. 2019-2023. **87+**.

2017 Chardonnay “Anderson Valley”- Alesia (Rhys Vineyards)

The 2017 Chardonnay “Anderson Valley” bottling from Alesia (made from the younger vine fruit in the Rhys vineyards in Mendocino) is outstanding in this vintage. The wine comes in at a cool 12.5 percent and delivers an aromatic constellation of apple, a touch of passion fruit,

beautiful soil tones, lime blossoms, a touch of citrus oil and a deft foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nicely structured, with a lovely core, zesty acids and great focus and grip on the still fairly tightly-wound and youthful finish. This is excellent and is going to steadily improve for the next four to five years and may easily last twenty! *Chapeau!* 2019-2040. **92.**

2017 Chardonnay “Santa Cruz Mountains”- Alesia (Rhys Vineyards)

The 2017 Santa Cruz Mountains bottling of chardonnay from Alesia is just a whisper ripper than the superb Anderson Valley cuvée, but still very civilized at 12.6 percent octane. The wine is deep and nascently complex on the nose, offering up scents of pineapple, lime, complex, salty minerality, citrus peel, orange blossoms and a whisper of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a youthful personality, lovely depth at the core, great mineral drive, snappy acids and a long, complex and very promising finish. This deserves a year or two in the cellar to start to blossom before it is unleashed at the table! 2021-2040+. **92.**

2017 Chardonnay “Oak Ridge Vineyard”- Analemma (Columbia Gorge)

The Oak Ridge Vineyard bottling of 2017 chardonnay from Steven Thompson was raised in a combination of older casks and cement for thirteen months of its *elevage*, prior to assembling and three finishing months in stainless steel tanks, so the wine never saw any new oak. The wine offers up a bit of Mâconnais profile in its aromatic constellation of apple, nectarine, lovely soil tones, a touch of almond, spring flowers and just a whisper of gentle leesy tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nicely focused, with a good core, good acids and lovely balance and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is already quite tasty, but will develop more complexity with a bit of bottle age. 2019-2030. **89.**

2017 Chardonnay “Howard Family Vineyard”- Big Basin Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mtns.)

The 2017 Chardonnay “Howard Family Vineyard” from Big Basin is a fine, old school example of this varietal. The wine is nicely measured in ripeness, coming in at 13.5 percent and offering up a bright and complex bouquet of apple, pear, gentle spice tones, a good base of soil and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and wide open in personality, with good depth at the core, sound acids and lovely length and grip on the fairly complex finish. Good juice and very user-friendly. 2019-2025. **89.**

2017 Chardonnay “Bieze Vineyard”- Franny Beck Vineyards (Willamette Valley)

The 2017 “Bieze Vineyard” cuvée is Michael Sterling’s first chardonnay and it is a very fine, inaugural example of this varietal from his Franny Beck Vineyards. The wine comes in at a nicely ripe 13.4 percent alcohol and delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of apple, white peach, a dollop of almond, citrus blossoms, a fine base of soil tones and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, good mineral drive, sound acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is quite elegant and already very tasty! 2019-2027. **90.**

2017 Chardonnay “Petaluma Gap”- Kendric Vineyards (Marin County)

There are only two casks of chardonnay from Stewart Johnson in the 2017 vintage, which is too bad, as the wine is lovely. The bouquet is pure and nicely discreet in profile, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, almond, a fine base of soil, gentle floral tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced, with a fine core, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the complex and classy finish. This is a very elegant example of California chardonnay. 2019-2025+. **91.**

2017 Chardonnay “Le Mie Figlie”- de Lancellotti Family Vineyards (Chehalem Mountains)

The 2017 Chardonnay “Le Mie Figlie” from Paul de Lancellotti is a beautifully cool and collected wine, tipping the scales at a very civilized octane of 12.3 percent. The nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of pear, almond, white flowers, delicate soil tones, a nice dollop of savory tones and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and nascently complex, with lovely focus and grip, a very good core, bright acids and fine grip on the long and classy finish. This is a beautiful example of how one does not need alcohol volume to deliver plenty of personality! Impressive juice. 2019-2027. **92.**

2017 Chardonnay “Anderson Vineyard”- de Lancellotti Family Vyd. (Dundee Hills)

The Anderson Vineyard is in the warmer Dundee Hills AVA and so this wine comes in a bit riper than the Le Mie Figlie bottling, tipping the scales at a full fourteen percent. The wine hails from non-grafted vines that are now twenty-five years of age, planted on a steep slope and farmed organically. The wine is raised in one-third new oak and offers up a lovely bouquet of ripe apple and pear, lovely, almost salty soil tones, buttercups, a hint of hazelnut, gentle shading of fresh nutmeg and a discreet base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and a bit riper in profile than the svelte Le Mie Figlie bottling, with good depth at the core, sound acids and very good length and grip on the complex finish. This is very good chardonnay, but it does not possess quite the same dancing beauty as the above wine. 2019-2023.

89.

2017 Chardonnay “Willamette Valley”- Morgen Long (Willamette Valley)

The regular bottling of Willamette Valley chardonnay from Seth Long in 2017 is composed of fruit from a hillside parcel in the Yamhill Vineyard that is planted on a Wente Clone that originated from Corton-Charlemagne. The fruit is picked at night and fermented with natural yeasts; the is aged in older barrels, with one-third comprised of “one wine” barrels and the other two-thirds several years older. The 2017 version comes in at thirteen percent octane and offers up a lovely nose of pear, apple, fresh almond, a fine base of soil tones and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and very precise, with a fine core, excellent transparency and cut, a nice hint of reductive elements and a long, complex and classy finish. Seth worked a *stage* with Etienne de Montille during his time in Burgundy, but it might as well have been with Jean-Marc Roulot in Meursault, given the style and class of this wine! 2019-2035+. **92.**

2017 Chardonnay “Willamette Valley” Black Label- Morgen Long (Willamette Valley)

The Black Label bottling of Willamette Valley chardonnay from Seth Long is from different vineyard sources than the above, with twenty-five percent of the fruit hailing each from Seven Springs Vineyard, Durant Vineyard, Yamhill Vineyard and AlexEli Vineyard. The wine also sees ten percent new wood during its *elevage*, in contrast to the entirely used casks for the above. The 2017 Black Label offers up a lovely aromatic constellation of pear, apple, a touch of *crème patissière*, good soil tones, a touch of almond and a delicate framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite generous out of the blocks, with a good core of fruit, bright acids and lovely balance and focus on the long and classy finish. The above wine seems to have just a touch more stuffing at the core and is likely to age a bit longer as well, but the Black Label is probably the better wine for drinking over the first couple of years the wines are out in the market. Good juice. 2019-2030. **91.**

2017 Chardonnay “Willamette Valley” Pink Label- Morgen Long (Willamette Valley)

The Pink Label bottling takes its name from the unusual inclusion of one percent pinot noir in the *cépages* of this wine, all as lees, rather than juice. The wine does not show any overt

color from this tiny inclusion, but it is a very interesting tangent. The remainder of the blend draws upon a variety of top chardonnay vineyards, with a twenty-five percent of the blend hailing respectively from the Seven Springs, Durant and AlexEli Vineyards, and twenty-four percent from the Yamhill Vineyard. For those keeping score at home, the pinot noir lees came from the Maresh Vineyard. The wine's *elevage* is also quite novel, with the wines spending six months in barrel, with ten percent new, followed by six months in stainless steel and then back into older, used *demi-muids* that previously housed pinot noir, and this is where the tiny amount of pinot noir lees were added into the wine. It all works beautifully, as the 2017 Pink Label offers up a very expressive bouquet of apple, pear, a touch of baking spices, fresh almond, lovely soil tones, a hint of *crème patissière* and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a fine core, lovely cut and grip and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. Perhaps the tiny addition of pinot noir lees have added a bit more mid-palate stuffing to the wine? In any event, it is excellent juice. 2019-2040. **92.**

2017 Chardonnay “Willamette Valley” White Label- Morgen Long (Willamette Valley)

The White Label bottling from Seth Long hails entirely from Seven Springs Vineyard fruit and was farmed biodynamically. This cuvée sees more lees aging, as some of the gross lees are included when the wine is decanted into cask for fermentation, and weekly *battonage* was practiced up through the completion of malo. The White Label also sees more new oak than most of Seth's chardonnays, being raised in forty-four percent new wood for one year, before being racked to stainless steel for another six months, with the fine lees again included for this portion of its *elevage*. The wine is a bit more reductive than the other Willamette Valley bottlings out of the blocks, but also very precise and racy (and not what I expected from additional *battonage*), wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, lemon, apple, white lilies, lovely soil tones, almond and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is precise, focused and still quite tightly-knit, with a full-bodied and well-balanced format, a fine core and excellent cut and grip on the very long and promising finish. This is still a tad reductive on the palate (in a good, Roulot-like way) and built for the long haul, so I would not broach a bottle for at least the next two or three years and really let it start to stir. Of all the Willamette Valley bottlings from Seth Long this year, this is my favorite! 2022-2045+. **93.**

2017 Chardonnay “Loubejac Vineyard”- Morgen Long (Eola-Amity Hills)

As I mentioned in my last report on American wines in February, Seth Long's chardonnay bottling from the Loubejac Vineyard is one of his youngest vine cuvées, as these vines are only nine years of age in 2017. As it is younger vine fruit, it is aged in used barrels for one year, prior to racking into stainless steel tanks for an additional three months of *elevage*. The 2017 Loubejac is very stylish, wafting from the glass in a nascently complex blend of apple, pear, fresh almond, lovely soil tones, spring flowers and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very nicely balanced, with zesty acids, a lovely core and impressive backend energy and grip on the long and classy finish. This is first class chardonnay and even more impressive in that it hails from young vines! 2019-2030+. **92.**

2017 Chardonnay “Seven Springs Vineyard”- Morgen Long (Eola-Amity Hills)

This is the first bottling of chardonnay from Seth Long that I have tasted that originates with fruit from the biodynamically-farmed Seven Springs Vineyard. The wine was barrel-fermented primarily with indigenous yeasts (one or two casks needed a booster from a neutral commercial yeast to finish up) and then aged in one-third new oak casks (one out of three barrels). It spent one year in oak and then six months finishing in stainless steel prior to bottling. The wine offers up beautiful aromatic refinement in its constellation of pear, white peach, a hint

of hazelnut, spring flowers, a lovely base of soil tones and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, a zesty girdle of acidity and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. These too are young vines (only planted in 2012), but they show no signs of young viney dilution and the wine is rock solid and extremely impressive in 2017. Welcome to the party! 2019-2040+. **93+**.

2017 Chardonnay “Eyrie Vineyard”- Morgen Long (Dundee Hills)

As I mentioned last February, Jason Lett has started selling the production from a small parcel of vines in the old Eyrie Vineyard to Seth Long, with these vines having been planted back in 1968 on a base of volcanic soils. There is only a single cask and it is a “one wine” barrel for the *elevage*. The 2017 Eyrie Vineyard bottling is a superb follow-up to the stellar 2016 version, offering up a more open and less reductive nose than the 2016, wafting from the glass in a beautiful blend of golden delicious apple, pear, hazelnut, a fine base of soil tones, a hint of orange blossoms, a wisp of iodine and lovely bass notes of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and delivers superb mid-palate depth, with outstanding focus and grip, bright, zesty acids and great breed and nascent complexity on the very, very long and classy finish. This is dynamite chardonnay! 2019-2045. **94**.

2017 Chardonnay “Sandi”- Morgen Long (Willamette Valley)

The Morgen Long “Sandi” bottling of chardonnay is named after Seth’s mother, who passed away in 2016. It is a blend of sixty percent Loubejac fruit, thirty percent Yamhill and ten percent Eyrie, and this is Seth’s only 2017 chardonnay bottling that saw more than a dollop of new oak, as this was raised in forty-five percent new casks. The wine comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and was bottled unfined and unfiltered. It delivers marvelous aromatic sophistication in its blend of pear, white peach, almond, salty soil tones, dried flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and very elegant in profile, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil signature, bright acids and a long, complex and gently new oak finish. This is really a delicious bottle of chardonnay that will age long and gracefully, but is a tad less tightly-knit out of the blocks than the 2016 version was in its youth and it is going to make it that much harder to keep one’s hands off of the 2017 Sandi and let it blossom with extended cellaring! 2019-2045. **93+**.

2017 Chardonnay “Durant Vineyard”- Patricia Green Cellars (Dundee Hills)

The Durant Vineyard cuvée of chardonnay from PGC is simply outstanding in 2017. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a nascently complex and zesty blend of apple, pear, a touch of hazelnut, lovely, almost salty soil tones, orange zest and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a lovely core, fine soil drive, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and very classy finish. This is not one of the Roulot-styled Oregon chardonnays that others are having such success with these days, nor a buttery and leesy Marcassin-wannabe, but rather a style that seems firmly embedded in the rich heritage of classic Oregon chardonnay. It will age very well indeed and develop another layer or two of complexity with further bottle age, but it is going to be hard to keep one’s hands off of it in the early going! Fine juice. 2019-2040. **92**.

2017 Chardonnay “Russian River Valley”- Porter Creek Vineyards

The 2017 Chardonnay from Porter Creek is an impressively low octane customer, tipping the scales at 12.1 percent and delivering a precise and very classy bouquet of apple, pear, almond, a lovely base of soil tones, just a hint of the *crème patissière* to come with further bottle age, white flowers and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and fairly tightly-knit out of the blocks, with a good core, excellent focus and lift and a long, vibrant

and nascently complex finish. This is already a lovely wine, but it will be even better with a couple of years in the cellar. 2019-2030. **91+**.



2017 Chardonnay “Alpine Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

Rhys’ 2017 Alpine chardonnay is a marvelous glass of wine and is already showing the first touch of candied lemon peel that I usually associate with the mature wines of Domaines Raveneau and Dauvissat in Chablis. But, here it plays a lovely supporting role in the aromatic constellation of pear, a touch of pineapple, complex, saline soil tones, acacia blossoms, a hint of vanilla pastry cream, vanillin oak and the aforementioned, incipient notes of candied lemon peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with excellent depth at the core, bright acids and superb focus and grip on the classy, vibrant and beautifully balanced finish. More complexity will come with bottle age, but this is not going to be an easy bottle to keep one’s hands off of in the cellar. This is flat out delicious! 2019-2045. **94**.

2017 Chardonnay “Bearwallow Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Anderson Valley)

The Rhys team’s 2017 Bearwallow chardonnay is absolutely stellar. The beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of pear, golden delicious apple, lemon blossoms, lovely soil tones, a whisper of citrus oil, vanillin oak and an exotic touch of bergamot in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and zesty, with great mid-palate depth, excellent soil signature, bright, bouncy acids and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and very vibrant finish. This is outstanding chardonnay! By the way, it tips the scales at

12.8 percent. It is already very, very tasty, but I would try to let it sit in the cellar for at least a couple more years, as there is another level of complexity still to unlock here. 2021-2040. **93.**

2017 Chardonnay “Horseshoe Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2017 Horseshoe Vineyard chardonnay from Rhys is a beautiful wine, with simply gorgeous and very fresh fruit tones coupled to lovely underlying minerality. The nose delivers a fine combination of fresh pineapple, apple, a hint of blood orange, almond, gently musky floral tones, a bit of bee pollen, a fine base of soil and a deft foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely racy, with a great core of pure fruit, lovely soil inflection, impeccable focus and balance and a long, zesty and complex finish. This wine comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and clearly proves that stunning depth and intensity does not require alcohol! Great juice. 2019-2045. **94.**

2017 Chardonnay “Mt. Pajaro Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2017 Mt. Pajaro Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Rhys Vineyards is nicely cool and solid-driven on both the nose and palate this year, with the shale mineral foundation giving the wine a nice backend transparency. The wine comes in at 12.7 percent and offers up a lovely bouquet of pear, fresh almond, white lilies, a dollop of orange zest, stony soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a good core of fruit, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the nicely transparent finish. This is understated and very classy. 2019-2030+. **91.**

2017 Chardonnay- Sequoia Grove Winery (Napa Valley)

The 2017 Chardonnay from Sequoia Grove is a tasty bottle, coming in listed at 14.1 percent alcohol and offering up a ripe and inviting nose of apple, pineapple, a nice dollop of soil tones, orange peel and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with good depth at the core, fine balance and a long, tasty finish. It is not overly complex and one gets the sense that it is a very safely-made, by the numbers chardonnay, that takes no chances and would really impress a focus group, but is perhaps a bit outpaced by those producers these days willing to take a few more chances for personality's sake. 2019-2022. **88.**

2017 Chardonnay “Claire’s Vineyard”- The Withers (Sonoma Coast)

The 2017 Chardonnay “Claire’s Vineyard” bottling from The Withers is new to me this year, as this is the first and last time that Andrew Tow will produce it. The wine is named in memory of his late mother, and the fruit for this cuvée actually hails from the vineyard of Taylor Lane Vineyard near Sebastopol. The wine is a tad riper than the Peters Vineyard bottling, but still quite civilized in this day and age, tipping the scales at 13.8 percent octane. The wine is quite expressive on the nose, wafting from the glass in a fine mix of apple, a touch of fresh pineapple, alluvial soil tones, white flowers, a hint of fresh almond and a nice foundation of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and gently leesy in personality, with good depth at the core, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is quite tasty. 2019-2026+. **90.**

2017 Chardonnay “Peters Vineyard”- The Withers (Sonoma Coast)

Last year was my first introduction to chardonnay from The Withers, as the 2016 Peters Vineyard bottling showed up in my sample allocation and it was quite good. The 2017 vintage is a fine follow-up to the 2016 and just a tad lower in octane, coming in at 13.5 percent and offering up a lovely and youthful bouquet of apple, pear, gentle leesy tones, a touch of nutskin, salty soil tones and a nice dollop of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still fairly primary in personality, with good depth at the core, fine soil signature, zesty acids and very good length and grip on the finish. Today, my issue is the wine has not yet really snapped

into focus and is still a bit adolescent, but all of the constituent components are here and I have to believe it will eventually bounce into place and merit a score at the top of my range. But, give it at least another six months in the bottle to blossom. 2020-2030+. **89-91+**.

2016 Chardonnay “Coastview Vineyard”- Big Basin Vineyards (Gabilan Mountains)

While I like the 2017 Howard Family Vineyard bottling of chardonnay quite well from Big Basin, one steps up a bit with the 2016 Coastview Vineyard bottling. This is a touch riper than its younger sibling, tipping the scales at 13.7 percent, but is cool and classy in both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a complex mix of pear, golden delicious apple, a hint of honeysuckle, almond, a touch of fresh nutmeg, lovely soil tones and discreet base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with lovely depth at the core, a very elegant profile, good acids and lovely length and grip on the balanced and very classy finish. This has a bit more depth at the core than the Howard Family bottling and a more refined, complex backend. Lovely wine. 2019-2025. **91+**.

2016 Chardonnay- Stony Hill Vineyards (Spring Mountain District)

The 2016 Chardonnay from Stony Hill Vineyards is a classic in the making. The wine comes in at its customary thirteen percent octane and offers up a youthful and very promising nose of pear, apple, chalky soil tones, dried flowers, a hint of orange peel, incipient notes of beeswax and a hint of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very long on the backend, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, a fine girdle of acidity and a long, beautifully balanced and nascently complex finish. Like all Stony Hill chardonnays, this is approachable today, but one is only seeing a glimpse of the complexity that will come with extended cellaring. It is destined to be a superb vintage for this iconic bottling, but the real magic will not start to emerge for another decade. 2019-2060+. **94**.

2015 Chardonnay “La Cruz Vineyard”- Côte West (Sonoma Coast)

This is the current release of chardonnay from Brett Hogan at Côte West, which is very impressive for having the patience to hold the wine back until it is really hitting on all cylinders. The wine comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and is quite lovely, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a classy blend of lemon, pear, a whisper of fresh pineapple, lime blossoms, salty soil tones, acacia blossoms and a discreet foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and wide open in personality, with a superb core of fruit, fine acids, lovely balance and grip and a long, complex and elegant finish. The wine shows a bit more oak influence on the backend of the palate than it does on the nose, but this is still a delicious bottle of chardonnay. 2019-2025+. **91**.

2015 Chardonnay- Mount Eden Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2015 Chardonnay from Mount Eden Vineyards is a lovely bottle, with a bit more ripeness than some recent vintages from Jeffrey Patterson, as it tips the scales at fourteen percent, but it is precise, pure and vibrant on both the nose and palate. At four years of age, the bouquet is really starting to blossom beautifully, offering up scents of pear, hazelnuts, a touch of acacia blossom, complex soil tones, citrus peel, vanillin oak, lavender and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, bright acids and a long, complex and zesty finish. With its relatively higher octane for Mount Eden, I suspect that this will not be a long distance runner of a vintage for this bottling, but for drinking over the next ten to twelve years, this is going to be a superb drink. 2019-2030+. **93**.

2014 Chardonnay “Yamhill Vineyards”- Morgen Long (Yamhill-Carlton)

Seth Long very kindly shared a bottle of his inaugural vintage of 2014 chardonnay with me for this article, with his 2014 Yamhill Vineyards bottling arriving with the range of 2017s. The wine is aging just beautifully and is still quite youthful, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of pear, apple, a hint of *crème patissière*, fresh almond, citrus zest, lovely soil tones, lime blossoms and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, pure and very elegant in profile, with a good core, lovely transparency down to the soil, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and very nicely balanced finish. This was bottled fairly reductively and I have to imagine that it was a bit backwards when Seth first released it, but it is starting to blossom very nicely at age five and drinking with plenty of personality. That said, as good as this wine is today, the 2017s represent a quantum step up to the next level and are going to be even better down the road than this lovely wine is today! 2019-2040. **92.**

Off the Beaten Path White Varietals

2018 Viognier “Petaluma Gap”- Kendric Vineyards (Marin County)

Stewart Johnson’s 2018 Viognier is a tad less ripe than the 2017 version and, naturally, I like it better for that! This vintage is pretty moderate in ripeness for this varietal in California, coming in at 13.6 percent and offering up a classy bouquet of pear, casaba melon, acacia blossoms, a dollop of coriander seed and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully zesty, with a fine core of fruit, good transparency and a long, vibrant and very well-balanced finish. I struggle with this varietal on many occasions, as global warming has not been all that kind to it, but I really like the Kendric 2018 version! 2019-2022+? **90.**

2017 Carricante “Centennial Mountain”- Aeris (Sonoma)

The first vintage of Carricante from the Sonoma vineyard up on Centennial Mountain from Kevin Harvey and his Rhys team is outstanding. As these vines do not have the same bedrock of mineral complexity as their eighty year-old counterparts on Mount Etna (see below), they highlight more of the fruit and floral aspects of this varietal. The bouquet is pure and nascently complex, delivering a refined blend of tart pear, green apple, a hint of olive, white flowers, beeswax and a lovely bass line of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and beautifully balanced, with fine intensity of flavor, excellent complexity and lift and a very long, focused and zesty finish that shows plenty of potential for further positive evolution with long-term cellaring. This does not quite have the same mid-palate depth and backend grip of its Sicilian counterpart, but then, these vines are not yet eighty years of age! It is an outstanding wine. 2019-2045+. **93.**

2017 Blanco “Mosier Hills Estate”- Analemma (Columbia Gorge)

The 2017 Blanco “Mosier Hills Estate” bottling from Steven Thompson at Analemma is one of their new cuvées that explores the beautiful varieties of Galicia, as the wine is composed of a blend of fifty percent Godello and thirty percent Albariño, augmented by twenty percent of Viognier. It was raised in a combination of neutral oak and stainless steel and comes in at 13.5 percent octane. The bouquet is lovely, offering up notes of lemon, green pear, a lovely base of salty soil tones, a hint of olive, dried flowers and a hint of smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with good acids, fine focus and grip and a long, vibrant and classy finish. The Viognier in the blend here is very understated and probably adds as much mid-palate volume as it does flavor or aromatic elements. This is lovely juice-particularly given that the Galician varieties have to still be young vines! 2019-2025+. **90.**

2015 Carricante “Etna Bianco Superiore”- Aeris (Sicily)

This wine does not properly belong in this report, but as it is the precursor to the Sonoma version of Carricante that the team at Rhys Vineyards is now producing from Centennial Mountain, and was sent by Kevin Harvey along with the new 2017 Aeris Carricante from Sonoma, it seemed fitting to place it in this article. This wine hails from a prime vineyard on the eastern flank of Mount Etna, planted at 2400 feet above sea level and owned by Kevin Harvey of Rhys. These old vines are eighty years of age! The wine is produced in collaboration with Salvo Foti, who is a top winegrower in Sicily and will be an ongoing project, with the first vintage released from the Sicilian vineyard having been the 2014. The 2015 Carricante offers up a deep and youthful bouquet of lemon peel, tart apple, a touch of green olive, salty minerality, dried flowers, a bit of beeswax and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with lovely mineral drive, blossoming complexity, lovely balance and grip and a long, very promising finish. Carricante is renowned for long aging and this fine 2015 version is still in climbing mode and will be better with some further bottle age, but it is already quite tasty today. 2019-2045+. **94.**

Gamay and Loire Valley Red Varietals

2017 Bone-Jolly Gamay Noir- Edmunds St. John (Eldorado County)

The 2017 Bone-Jolly Gamay Noir from Steve Edmunds comes in at a properly ripe 12.9 percent octane and offers up a vibrant, red fruity bouquet of strawberries, sweet cranberries, vinesmoke, pepper, a lovely base of soil, fresh thyme and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, juicy and intensely flavored, with a nice touch of mid-palate succulence, tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the complex and simply delicious finish. As has been the case for several years, this is as close as one can come to top flight Beaujolais in California, and as I always say, it would be so nice to see this wine bottled under a natural cork, rather than a screwcap. Another lovely vintage for Steve’s Bone-Jolly. 2019-2025+. **90.**

2015 Bebame Red (Cabernet Franc and Gamay)- (El Dorado County)

Bebame is the joint project of Don Heisturman, whose day job is as a wine distributor in Oregon, and Steve Edmunds of Edmunds St. John fame. The third partner in the project is Ron Mansfield, who manages many of the top vineyards in the Sierra Foothills and has worked with Steve for many years. The 2015 Bebame red is a blend of ninety-six percent cabernet franc and just four percent gamay, with the octane here a very civilized 12.5 percent. The nose is deep and nicely complex, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, fresh herb tones, cigar ash, a bit of bell pepper and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and really fairly open in personality and drinking well, with a plush core, a nice touch of well-integrated tannin and very good length and grip on the vibrant and complex finish. This is bottled under a screwcap, which I think is a shame, as it has the balance to age really well. As this is now four years of age and shows no signs of reduction, it seems that the closure is not presently an issue, but my gut instinct is that there would be just a bit more textural generosity on the backend under a natural or agglomerated cork. That said, this is a very good wine for fans of Loire Valley reds and really a fine value. It may be a touch too bell peppery in personality for some wine drinkers, but if you already understand cabernet franc, this will be right up your alley. 2019-2030+? **89.**



One can do a lot worse in the world of wine than to sidle up to any of these superb Rhône-inspired bottlings.

Syrah and Other Rhône Varietals and Blends

2017 Grenache “Mounts Vineyard”- Côte West (Dry Creek Valley)

Côte West’s 2017 Grenache bottling from Mounts Vineyard in Dry Creek hails from soils that are volcanic and heavily-infused with iron. The wine is very impressively low octane for this varietal, coming in at 13.5 percent. The wine is nicely pale in color, but a bit reductive when first opened, so needs some time in decanter to blossom, but eventually offers up a fine nose of raspberries, pepper, *garrigue*, impressive minerality and a nice touch of savory elements (celery seed?) in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, fine transparency and grip, tangy acids and a long, moderately tannic and still quite primary finish. The reduction here never quite blows off on the backend of the palate and I probably did not decant it quite long enough, so give it a full hour in decanter if you would like to drink it now. It has quite good constituent components and I suspect it will age very nicely and the reduction will not be an issue if you leave it alone in the cellar for five to ten years. Good juice. 2019-2045+. **89+**.

2017 Syrah “Petaluma Gap”- Kendric Vineyards (Marin County)

The 2017 Syrah “Petaluma Gap” from Kendric Vineyards is one of the most elegant examples of this varietal that I have tasted in years and years from California. The wine comes in at a classic 13.7 percent alcohol and offers up a pure and precise bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, black olive, smoked meats and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the

wine is svelte, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a good core, fine-grained tannins and excellent length and grip on the light on its feet and complex finish. This is not a powerful example of syrah, but rather one of excellent complexity, intensity of flavor and budding complexity. First class juice! 2023-2055+. **92+**.

2017 Syrah “Petaluma Gap”- Model Farm (Sonoma Coast)

The 2017 Syrah “Petaluma Gap” from the husband and wife team Sean Castorani and Joanna Wells’ Model Farm is a superb follow-up to their outstanding 2016 version. The brutal heat wave that roared through northern California during Labor Day weekend of 2017 could have really been a problem for Sean and Joanna, but they chose to be patient, let the vines recover and picked slowly and carefully many days after the heat spike, so as to bring in properly ripe and undamaged fruit. Their resulting syrah is outstanding, tipping the scales at a very civilized 12.5 percent octane and offering up a superb and utterly classic bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, black olive, a fine array of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured this year, with a fine core of fruit, firm, well-integrated tannins and superb length and grip on the complex, youthful and very promising finish. This will need a bit more time in the cellar to stretch its wings than the 2016 version, but it is going to be every bit as stellar in the fullness of time. If you have not yet noticed, Model Farm is making some of the most brilliant syrahs in all of California right now! 2027-2065. **94.**

2017 Cunoise- The Withers (El Dorado)

I had really enjoyed the 2016 vintage of Cunoise from The Withers, which is not a varietal one sees very often (other than as part of the *cépages* at Château de Beaucastel) and the 2017 version is a lovely follow-up. The wine is again very light and transparent in color this year, but is long on personality, offering up a complex bouquet of dark berries, a bit of roasted game, chicory, lovely soil tones that will turn autumnal quickly, lavender, bonfire and a topnote of tree bark. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, excellent soil signature, modest tannins and a long, tangy and ripe finish. This is just a touch higher in octane than last year (13.3 percent versus 12.9), but just as light on its feet and is a really fine detour off the beaten red wine path! 2019-2035+. **91.**

2016 Syrah “Mosier Hills Estate”- Analemma (Columbia Gorge)

The 2016 “Mosier Hills Estate” bottling of Syrah from Analemma is excellent, tipping the scales at 13.3 percent octane and delivering a first class and very classic bouquet of cassis, black raspberry, smoked meats, pepper, black olive, smoke and a fine base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with great balance, nascent complexity, ripe, buried tannins and outstanding length and grip on the very, very promising finish. The soil signature is different, but in all other respects, this could be a top rate example of old school Cornas. Great juice! 2026-2065. **93.**

2016 Syrah “Sumu Kaw Vineyard”- La Clarine Farm (Sierra Foothills)

The 2016 Sumu Kaw Vineyard bottling of syrah from La Clarine Farm comes in at a cool 12.8 percent octane. The wine is sealed up under screwcap, but is showing absolutely no aromatic ill effects from its closure at the present time, offering up a complex bouquet of black raspberries, cassis, pepper, roasted meats, a touch of black olive, a fine bass line of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, ripe, fairly firm tannins and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is pretty shut down on the backend when it is first opened, but starts to stir a bit with some

time in decanter. It still deserves some time in the cellar to reach its peak, and I would have been very, very happy to see it sealed up under natural cork, as one worries how it will evolve under screwcap, but all of the constituent components are in place here for a first rate bottle of syrah. I hope the screwcap lets it get across the finish line! 2023-2050. **90+**.

2016 Carignane Old Vine “The Pleasant Peasant”- Clos Saron (Sierra Foothills)

Readers may recall that I loved the 2015 version of The Pleasant Peasant from Gideon Beinstock’s Clos Saron winery. For those who may not have seen last year’s review, The Pleasant Peasant bottling is made entirely from carignan vines planted in 1900, with the winemaking as old school as it gets, with the grapes foot-trodden and fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in old French casks. The 2016 Peasant is a superb follow-up to the 2015 version, coming in at 13.3 percent octane and delivering a simply stellar bouquet of sweet dark berries, roasted meats, chicory, brown spices, a distinct note of clove, a touch of lavender and a great base of soil tones that will get autumnal in short order. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and impressively concentrated with old vine fruit at the core, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and very well-balanced finish. There is just a whisper of volatile acidity here on the palate, so I would recommend decanting the wine for fifteen minutes before serving, as this allows it to blow off completely. This is an excellent wine. 2019-2045. **93**.

2016 Syrah “Horseshoe Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2016 Horseshoe Vineyard syrah from Rhys Vineyards is outstanding. The wine is 12.7 percent in alcohol and beautifully balanced, deep and refined. The youthful bouquet offers up a very complex blend of cassis, smoked meats, pepper, a bit of lavender, coffee bean, superb soil tones, a bit of bonfire and incipient notes of Hermitage-like straw elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and shows off lovely depth in the mid-palate, with ripe, chewy tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very long, soil-driven and complex finish. This is stellar syrah in the making! 2025-2060. **94+**.

2016 Grenache- The Withers (El Dorado)

The 2016 Grenache bottling from The Withers includes seven percent mourvèdre and six percent syrah in its *cépages* this year, to go along with the eighty-three percent grenache. The wine is nicely cool (at least in terms of this varietal), coming in at 13.4 percent octane and delivering a deep and quite complex bouquet of red and black cherries, pepper, really lovely spice tones, grilled venison, lavender, soil, cedar and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and nicely soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, ripe tannins, tangy acids and a long, well-balanced and impressively transparent finish. This is lovely and a great substitute for some of those fifteen percent Châteauneufs these days! It is quite approachable today, but will age very well indeed and show more complexity with some bottle age. 2019-2045. **92**.

2016 In Hand Red Wine Blend (The Withers) (El Dorado)

The “In Hand” bottling from Andrew Tow is a red wine blend composed primarily of mourvèdre and which is priced under \$25 per bottle. There will be additional In Hand labeled wines from Andrew in the not too distant future, but this 2016 is the first to appear under this label. It comes in at 13.7 percent octane, included thirty percent whole clusters and was raised all in older casks, ranging from ten to twenty years of age. The wine offers up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, dark berries, a bit of tree bark, chicory, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a lovely touch of sweet botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely structured, with a good core, suave tannins, lovely mineral drive and a long,

complex and very well-balanced finish. This is very, very good wine and a fine bargain. 2019-2040+. **91.**

2016 Mr. Burgess- The Withers (El Dorado)

The 2016 version of Mr. Burgess (named for the pony whose image graces the labels of all of The Withers bottlings) is composed of a blend of eighty-nine percent syrah and eleven percent mourvèdre this year. The wine is again sub-thirteen percent octane this year and simply stunning on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a complex assembly of cassis, a touch of black raspberry, pepper, hung game, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is very pure, full-bodied and peppery, with superb transparency down to the soil, tangy acids, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is an absolute beauty and will be a very refined, soil-driven example of (mostly) syrah when it is ready to go! 2023-2055. **93.**

2016 Ruben- The Withers (El Dorado)

The 2016 vintage of Ruben from The Withers is a blend of eighty-three percent mourvèdre, nine percent syrah and eight percent grenache. This cuvée has gotten a touch lower in octane each year that I have tasted it and the 2016 comes in at a very civilized 13.3 percent. Aromatically, the wine is just superb, offering up a deep and complex nose of red and black cherries, roasted venison, a touch of tree bark, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke, cedar and a lovely, spicy topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely spicy, with an excellent core of fruit, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the complex finish. With its high percentage of mourvèdre, one might expect it to have a bit of Bandol character, but it is much more red fruity and spicy than Bandol and is really a uniquely California interpretation of this varietal blend. The 2016 is a very good bottle in the making, which is already quite approachable, but will be even better with a bit of time in the cellar. 2022-2050. **91+.**

2015 Syrah “Coastview Vineyard Terraces”- Big Basin Vineyards (Monterey County)

This wine is produced from a special, particularly steep section of the Coastview Vineyard and was planted to syrah in 2007. The 2015 vintage is only the second that has been bottled on its own from Big Basin, with the wine coming in at 13.5 percent octane and having been fermented with indigenous yeasts and two-thirds whole clusters this year. The *elevage* takes place in 300 liter oak puncheons, with one of the three new for this vintage. The wine offers up a fine nose of cassis, sweet dark berries, pepper, a touch of black olive, spit-roasted game, a good dollop of soil, new leather and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and solid at the core, with excellent focus and balance, ripe tannins and lovely grip on the long and complex finish. This is first class syrah that is just starting to stretch its wings and is approachable with some decanting time, but really deserves a bit more bottle age to allow the tannins to soften up a bit more and the wine really to start hitting on all cylinders. Fine juice. 2022-2050+. **92.**

2015 Carignane Old Vine- Porter Creek Vineyards (Mendocino)

As I mentioned last year, Alex Davis crafts as good an example of Carignane as one can find in all of California. I reported on his 2015 Old Vine bottling of Carignane last summer and the wine has started to blossom beautifully with an extra year of bottle age. The nose wafts from the glass in a classy and smoky blend of pepper, black cherries, dark berries, spit-roasted venison, dark soil elements and just a dollop of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, broad-shouldered and rock solid at the core, with impressive focus, ripe,

buried tannins and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is certainly approachable today, particularly with a half hour in decanter, but it would still be a good idea to let it age at least a few more years in the cellar and really come into its own. It is a first class bottle in the making! 2022-2050. **92.**



Steve Edmunds- still the dean of Rhône varietals in California, as well as partisan of other very worthy grapes.

2014 Syrah “Stone Soup”- Clos Saron (Sierra Foothills)

The 2014 Stone Soup bottling of Syrah from Gideon Beinstock hails from a vineyard planted at two thousand feet of elevation, on a very granitic parcel that is owned by John and Ellen Trezevant. The vineyard is extremely steep and has a due south exposition, so it is hot and dry during the day and cool at night. The 2014 version of Stone Soup comes in at 12.7 percent alcohol and offers up a deep and youthful nose of dark berries, pepper, hung game, very stony soil tones, smoke and a gorgeous mix of savory and spice elements that recall things like wild fennel, lavender, violets and rosemary. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with superb mineral drive, fine focus and grip, firm, ripe tannins and a very long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is a fascinating wine in that it has great depth of fruit, but is still defined by its granitic mineral component and is light on its feet at 12.7 percent octane, despite having a formidable structure and needing some more bottle age to fully blossom. This is not as polished stylistically as, say, Steve Edmunds Barsotti Ranch Syrah, but there is great inherent complexity here and a sense of noble rusticity that promises to age into something very special for those patient enough to tuck it away in the cellar and let it blossom with bottle age. 2024-2065. **92.**

2014 Syrah “Barsotti Ranch”- Edmunds St. John (El Dorado County)

The 2014 Barsotti Ranch bottling of syrah from Steve Edmunds is one of the best young examples of this varietal I have tasted in the last several years. I reported on this wine a couple of times in the past, with the last bottle opened in the summer of 2018, and it continues to move along properly and shows outstanding promise on both the nose and palate. The bouquet today is just starting to emerge nicely, offering up scents of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, roasted game, a beautiful base of stony soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and intensely flavored, rather than concentrated, with lovely balance and grip, tangy acids, seamless tannins and a very long, very complex and vibrant finish. I love the almost pinot-like transparency of the 2014 Barsotti Ranch syrah, but that is the beauty of old vines and only twelve percent octane! 2024-2065+. **94+**.

Off the Beaten Path Red Varietals and Blends

2017 Mencía “Mosier Hills Vineyard”- Analemma (Columbia Gorge)

The Mosier Hills Vineyard is the home vineyard of Steven Thompson’s Analemma, and though it sits right along the south shore of the Columbia River, I am not certain if this is officially part of the Columbia Gorge AVA. In any case, Steven budded over three acres of the home vineyard to Mencía five years ago and I was very excited to taste both the 2017 and 2016 versions for this report (sadly, my sample of the 2016 was corked and will have to wait for another bottle to arrive east), as readers know how much I love this varietal. The bouquet of the lovely 2017 is absolutely a classical expression of this beautiful grape, wafting from the glass in a blend of sweet dark berries, pomegranate, pepper, vinesmoke, a fine base of soil and a topnote of tree bark. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and light on its feet (it is 12.5 percent octane), with fine intensity of flavor, moderate tannins, good acids and fine focus and grip on the very well-balanced finish. For obvious reasons, this does not have the same sappy core of the bottlings from Ribeira Sacra and Bierzo made from seventy-five to one hundred year-old vines, but it is an excellent example of Mencía and clearly shows that this very good bottling is going to be flat out great when the vines get even older. 2019-2045. **91**.

2017 El Jaleo “Shake Ridge Ranch”- Edmunds St. John (Amador County)

The El Jaleo bottling from Steve Edmunds is new to me with this 2017 vintage, and this is one of the most unique red wine blends that I have come across from California in a long time. The *cépages* here is thirty-two percent Mourvèdre, twenty-eight percent Grenache, twenty-six percent Graciano and fourteen percent Tempranillo! The 2017 El Jaleo comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and offers up a lovely aromatic constellation of black raspberries, cassis, smoked meats, cigar smoke, soil and a lovely dollop of spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite velvety already on the attack, with fine focus and grip, a very good core and a long, balanced, gently-tannic and quite tasty finish. Though the tempranillo here is the smallest component in the blend, it really is the defining varietal here! Fine and utterly unique juice. 2019-2045+. **91**.

2016 Tinto “Mosier Hills Estate”- Analemma (Columbia Gorge)

The 2016 Tinto “Mosier Hills Estate” bottling from Analemma is made of a very unique *cépages* of fifty percent tempranillo, forty percent grenache and ten percent syrah. It comes in at an octane of 13.8 percent and was raised in older oak for fourteen months prior to bottling. The wine offers up a superb and quite vibrant nose of red and black raspberries, a touch of meatiness, woodsmoke, hints of *garrigue* and pepper, stony minerality and a lovely savory topnote in the

upper register that recalls both wild fennel and celery seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, good focus and grip and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is good juice, with more Rhône personality than Rioja, but admirable complexity and potential for longevity in the cellar. 2019-2045. **91.**

2016 Primitivo “Stroke of Luck”- The End of Nowhere (Amador County)

The End of Nowhere is the *négociant* label for Chris Walsh, who grew up in Amador, but spent several years working in New York City prior to moving back west and planting his own vineyard in Amador in 2014. As his own vineyard is still too young for his tastes, he is making some wines under his End of Nowhere label from purchased grapes, with this wine hailing from grapes grown on the Shake Ridge Vineyard in Amador, which also supplies grapes to Steve Edmunds. Chris’ 2016 Primitivo comes in at a cool 12.2 percent octane, was fermented whole cluster and raised in neutral casks. The nose here wafts from the glass in a fine blend of black cherries, black raspberries, bonfire, ferrous soil tones, a nice array of brown spices and a bit of a brambly topnote that recalls zinfandel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, velvety and complex, with some youthful stemminess, a surprisingly plush core for such low octane, just a bit of tannin and a long, complex finish. This is already quite tasty (for those that do not mind a touch of youthful whole cluster), but will probably be even better with a few years in the cellar to stretch its wings. Good juice. 2019-2040. **89+.**

2016 Cabernet Pfeffer “Wirz Vineyard”- Ser Winery (San Benito County)

This is the first bottle of Cabernet Pfeffer I have ever tasted, and I had not even heard of the varietal until this bottle from Nicole Walsh arrived at my stoop. Its historical origins are uncertain, but it is guessed that this is a cross between cabernet sauvignon and perhaps, trousseau. In any event, these are ninety-five year-old vines that are being sourced by Ms. Walsh, so the variety must have been around for a while. The vineyard in San Benito is dry-farmed on a soil base of granite and limestone. The wine is nicely cool at 13.3 percent alcohol and was made with one hundred percent whole clusters and indigenous yeasts. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up notes of dark berries, chicory, a bit of coffee grounds, a discreet touch of botanicals (faintly reminiscent of Canary Islands’ reds), lovely minerality and pepper. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully peppery in personality, with a good core, tangy acids, a fair bit of ripe tannin and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Again, this is sealed under screwcap but shows absolutely no signs of reduction issues- most impressive. Fine juice and a new world to me! 2019-2040+. **91.**

2015 Graciano “John Smith Vineyard”- Ser Winery (San Benito County)

The 2015 Graciano “John Smith Vineyard” bottling from Nicole Walsh’s Ser Winery is produced from twenty year-old vines grown in San Benito County. The vineyard is mostly dry-farmed and the wine was fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in an older French oak puncheon. The 2015 comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a lovely and red fruity bouquet of cherries, a touch of blood orange, beautiful, Rioja-like spice tones (Graciano is after all, one of the best grapes in Rioja, though used a lot less than it used to be), a lovely base of soil and a whiff of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a good core, moderate, seamless tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex, light on its feet and very nicely balanced finish. This is sealed under screwcap (as are all of Nicole’s wines), but this one showed absolutely no signs of reduction, nearly four years out from the vintage! Fine, fine juice. 2019-2040+. **92.**



Cabernet Sauvignon and Friends

2017 Cabernet Sauvignon- North 42 Degrees Winery (Lake Eerie North Shore- Ontario)

Winemaker Jan Schulte-Bisping had crafted a terrific bottle of cabernet sauvignon in the 2016 vintage, which was clearly the finest red wine I had ever tasted from Ontario, so I was very curious to see how he would do with this varietal in the follow-up vintage of 2017. The wine is again excellent and has a lovely, old school Bordeaux sensibility to it on both the nose and palate. This is even a touch less ripe than the 2016 version, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol and offering up a superb bouquet of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, a touch of tobacco leaf, a nice dollop of soil and a judicious framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthful, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip, ripe tannins and very good length on the nascently complex finish. This will want a bit of bottle age to blossom, but it is going to age quite well and will be a very tasty bottle once it is ready to drink. In a perfect world, this would be bottled under cork, rather than screwcap, but I understand the economics involved. There is a finishing note on the backend here that I can only equate as hailing from the *terroir* on the north shore of Lake Eerie that is quite unique, and which I quite like. 2024-2050. **90.**

2016 “Altitude 2292”- Big Basin Vineyards (Monterey County)

The “Altitude 2292” from Big Basin Vineyards is a ripe, but measured wine, coming in listed at 14.2 percent octane. The *cépages* here is forty-four percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty-eight percent merlot, eight percent cabernet franc, six percent malbec and four percent petit

verdot, so this is a Bordeaux-inspired blend that includes all the major varieties found on the Gironde. It includes forty-two percent whole clusters this year and was raised in one-third new oak. The wine delivers a complex and youthful bouquet of cassis, dark berry, cigar ash, a fine base of dark soil tones, a hint of the chipotle pepper to come with bottle age and a discreet base of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full and still fairly primary, with a good core of fruit, firm, ripe tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This wine is built for the cellar and needs a good eight to ten years to start to stir, but it should prove to be excellent once it has started to soften up and blossom. 2027-2065+. **91.**

2016 Cabernet Franc “Helios”- Corison Vineyards (Rutherford Bench)

The 2016 Cabernet Franc “Helios” bottling from Cathy Corison from her Sunbasket Vineyard is really good this year, coming in at 13.6 percent octane and offering up glorious purity and precision in its aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, tobacco leaf, a fine base of soil tones, cigar ash, a dollop of menthol, a dash of cedar and a beautiful floral topnote redolent of both lavender and violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very, very elegant in profile, with lovely depth at the core, ripe, seamless tannins, good acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is a stunning wine. 2026-2060. **94+.**

2016 Cabernet Sauvignon “Napa Valley”- Corison Vineyards (Rutherford Bench)

The 2016 vintage of Cathy Corison’s estate cabernet is the lowest octane version I can remember in a month of Mondays, as the wine comes in at an extremely svelte 13.1 percent this year. The bouquet is classic, wafting from the glass in a complex and very classy blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, Cuban cigar wrapper, Rutherford dust, a deft framing of cedary oak and just a hint of eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is extremely pure and focused, full-bodied and beautifully bound up in its sophisticated structural chassis, with a gorgeous core of fruit, great soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and superb length and grip on the seamlessly balanced finish. This is stunning juice, but it is built for the long haul (like all of Cathy’s wines) and will demand fully fifteen years of patience in the cellar before it edges into its plateau of maturity. It is an understated beauty, but this will be one of Cathy’s finest vintage for her estate bottling cabernet when it is fully ready to drink. But, let it hibernate in the cellar, as it deserves patience! 2034-2100. **95.**

2016 Cabernet Sauvignon “Sunbasket Vineyard”- Corison Vineyards (Rutherford Bench)

The 2016 Sunbasket Vineyard bottling of cabernet sauvignon from Cathy Corison is just a touch riper than the estate bottling, but still very civilized at 13.4 percent alcohol, and it too is an absolute cellar treasure in the making. The wine is a bit sappier on the nose than the estate bottling (as one would expect from a vineyard named Sunbasket), offering up a superb bouquet of black raspberries, black cherries, a hint of allspice, cigar smoke, tobacco leaf, an excellent base of soil tones and a discreet framing of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with ripe, well-integrated tannins, great focus and grip and a very long, nascently complex and promising finish. This will probably drink a few years sooner than the 2016 estate bottling, but should age just as long and gracefully and it will be for future generations to decide which bottling they like better thirty or forty years down the road! 2028-2090. **94+.**

2016 Cabernet Sauvignon- North 42 Degrees Winery (Lake Erie North Shore- Ontario)

I had not tasted a bottle of the 2016 cabernet from North 42 Degrees since a sample a year ago, but Jan kindly sent another bottle along with the 2017 and 2016 Reserve, so I could see how it was evolving one year down the road. The wine is aging very nicely indeed and again, is

really showing a nice Bordeaux stylistic styling to it that I find very exciting! The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, cigar smoke, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, a hint of currant leaf and a very discreet touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and beautifully balanced, with moderate, well-integrated tannins, find soil signature, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and classy finish. This is really starting to synthesize beautifully with an additional year's worth of bottle age and is more approachable today than I thought it would be last year, and though it is not fully mature, it is really awfully easy to drink already! 2023-2050. 91.



2016 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve- North 42 Degrees Winery (Lake Erie N.S.- Ontario)

The Reserve bottling of cabernet sauvignon from North 42 Degrees is a touch riper than the regular cuvée, coming in at 14.3 percent, but on the nose, it shares that same lovely, Médoc sensibilities on the nose, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar wrapper, a hint of menthol, dark soil tones, lovely smokiness and a discreet touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and focused, with an excellent core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is first class cabernet sauvignon done in a very Bordeaux-like, elegant style and may well be the best wine I have yet tasted from Canada! It is quite approachable today, but seems destined to also age very gracefully and I would opt for tucking it away in the cellar for at least five years and

letting it really blossom completely. Winemaker Jan Schulte-Bisping has really hit a homerun with this wine! 2024-2055. **92+**.

2016 Cabernet Franc Reserve- North 42 Degrees Winery (Lake Erie N.S.- Ontario)

Like the regular bottling of Cabernet Franc last year from Jan Schulte-Bisping, the 2016 Reserve bottling is riper than its cabernet sauvignon counterpart, tipping the scales at 14.5 percent octane. However, the wine carries its alcohol very well on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a ripe, but still quite pure blend of dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, chicory, a touch of currant leaf, tobacco smoke, incipient notes of chipotle pepper and a dollop of new oak. With air, there develops a very nice, St. Émilion-like note of menthol on the nose. On the palate the wine is complex, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with fine mid-palate depth, suave tannins and lovely length and grip on the poised and classy finish. Though this comes in listed at 14.5 percent alcohol, it seems cooler in the mouth than that and is really very nicely balanced. Impressive juice! 2019-2050. **92.**

2016 Cabernet Sauvignon- Sequoia Grove Winery (Napa Valley)

The 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon from Sequoia Grove is a plenty ripe wine, coming in listed at a less than svelte 14.6 percent octane. Despite its ripeness, it is surprisingly fresh and vibrant on the nose, offering up scents of black raspberries, black cherries, cigar smoke, dark chocolate, a bit of tobacco leaf and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is big, glossy and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, firm, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This really carries its alcohol well and shows no signs of backend heat or flavors of *sur maturité* and is really quite good. 2024-2060. **90.**

2016 Claret- White Rock Vineyards (Napa Valley)

Michael and Christopher Vandendreissche have fully taken over the direction of White Rock from their parents, who bought the property in 1977, and the next chapter of this family winery is now fully underway. Their 2016 Claret is mostly composed of cabernet sauvignon, which is eighty-three percent of the blend this year, with the balance of the blend being eleven percent merlot and three percent each of petit verdot and cabernet franc. The wine comes in at 14.4 percent octane, reflecting the higher altitude vineyards here at White Rock, up above the valley floor on the eastern side of Napa. The wine offers up a classy nose of cassis, black cherries, cigar wrapper, a nice dollop of soil and a discreet foundation of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, suave tannins, fine focus and a long, nascently complex finish. This is quite old school in terms of its indigenous yeast fermentation and moderate new oak, but it has a bit of the early sheen of today's style of cabernet-based Napa wines in its polished tannins and sense of early accessibility, so call it a hybrid of the first order. Good juice. 2019-2050. **91.**

2015 Cabernet Sauvignon- Stony Hill Vineyards (Spring Mountain)

The 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon from Stony Hill Vineyards is another great bottle in the making from this winery that is still almost exclusively known for its outstanding chardonnays. The wine tips the scales at a classic 13.5 percent alcohol and delivers a gorgeous and absolutely old school bouquet of cassis, black cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, a great base of mountain soil tones, cigar wrapper, just a whisper of fresh herbs and a stylish and discreet base of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and beautifully balanced, with a great core of fruit, superb soil signature, ripe, chewy tannins and great length and grip on the nascently complex and very, very promising finish. This is an outstanding cabernet in the making, with more than a passing similarity to Philip Togni's wines in terms of aromatics and flavors. This is

old school in every way, shape and form and one of the best cabernets now being produced from this great, historical style in all of Napa Valley. 2030-2100. **94+**.

2015 Cabernet Sauvignon “Tanbark Hill Vineyard”- Philip Togni (Spring Mountain)

Philip and Lisa Togni produce their Tanbark Hill bottling from the family’s estate vineyard in Spring Mountain, with a three acre section that is planted on slightly deeper and richer soils usually providing the lion’s share of the cuvée each year, as this section of the vineyard produces more forward wines out of the blocks. To this block are added any casks that are earmarked for the estate bottling of cabernet sauvignon that seem a bit more forward structurally, with the Tanbark Hill raised with the same methods in the cellars as the estate bottling, in forty percent new oak for twenty months prior to bottling. The 2015 Tanbark Hill cabernet is excellent on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a pure blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, mountain soil tones, tobacco leaf, just a whisper of cabernet herb tones and a well done base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, suave and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This is built to be a bit more accessible out of the blocks and it is already a very tasty drink, but it has the impeccable balance and depth to also age effortlessly for twenty-five years or more and will be even better down the road! 2019-2050. **91+**.

2015 Cabernet Sauvignon- Philip Togni Vineyard (Spring Mountain)

The 2015 estate bottling of cabernet sauvignon from the Togni family is an outstanding wine that will be very long-lived and utterly brilliant at its apogee, but patience will be required. The bouquet is deep, precise and utterly classical in personality, offering up an aromatic constellation of cassis, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, a marvelous base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and a discreet foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is very pure on the attack, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a fine chassis of seamless, buried tannin, excellent focus and grip and a long, classy and nascently complex finish. This is so beautifully balanced that it gives the false impression that it will come around in the middle term, but though the tannins are sweet and covered flawlessly, this has the chassis of a long-distance runner and will need fully fifteen years in the cellar to really start to properly stir. Once it gets rolling, it is going to be absolutely stunning and for many decades! 2033-2100. **94+**.

2014 Cabernet Sauvignon “Krueger Lane Vineyard”- Côte West (Napa Valley)

Côte West is a small winery based in Oakland, which sources grapes from a variety of different vineyards in the top north coast AVAs of California. Brett Hogan studied winemaking and viticulture and got his Masers at UC-Davis (his undergraduate degrees are in Economics and French Literature from Notre Dame); Brett did his *stages* post-graduation at both Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars and with Dominique Lafon of Domaine Comtes Lafon in Meursault. He and his wife Kerrie co-direct the winery, while taking care of their two young children. I had never tasted the wines from Côte West prior to this group of samples arriving and was quite impressed with what I tried. Their 2014 cabernet sauvignon hails from grapes purchased from the Krueger Lane Vineyard, which is one of the coolest sites in Napa, and the wine comes in at an even fourteen percent octane as a result. The wine is deep and nicely reserved on the nose, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, a fine base of soil, hints of the petroleum jelly elements to come and a very discreet base of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very classy, with an excellent core of fruit, fine focus and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and very promising finish. This is old school Napa cabernet, with good structure

and need for some time in the cellar to properly blossom. It is going to be excellent! 2024-2065. **92+.**

2014 Cabernet Sauvignon- White Rock Vineyards (Napa Valley)

Michael and Christopher Vandendreissche's 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon is fairly elevated in alcohol for my palate, coming in at 14.7 percent octane, but it carries its ripeness quite well and is fresh and precise on both the nose and palate and only betrays a whisper of backend heat on the finish. The bouquet is nicely old school in its blend of black cherries, cigar smoke, a touch of chocolate, just a whisper of eucalyptus, a good base of soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and shows off fine mid-palate depth, with ripe, seamless tannins, good focus and grip and a long, still quite primary finish that closes with the aforementioned dollop of heat. This should age quite well and will be a tasty bottle in due course, but I am not sure how much complexity is going to emerge in the coming years, as it is still pretty adolescent at the present time and it is hard to get a real feel for that today. But, at the very least, it will be a very good bottle, and perhaps, truly exceptional once it has had a chance to properly blossom. 2023-2055. **90+.**



Pinot Noir

2017 Pinot Noir “Anderson Valley”- Alesia (Rhys Vineyards)

The Anderson Valley bottling from Alesia is a touch riper than last year, but this is to be expected with the Labor Day heat spikes of 2017. The wine comes in at 13.8 percent octane this

year, but offers up a lovely, ripe and quite complex bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, raw cocoa, a lovely dollop of brown spices and just a whisper of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely ripe at the core, with good soil signature, suave tannins and a long, complex and gently warm finish. This wine carries its alcohol very well indeed and I suspect I might not even notice it if I were tasting the wine in the depths of February. Good juice that will drink beautifully from the outset, but will have no difficulties aging gracefully. 2019-2050. **90.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Santa Cruz Mountains”- Alesia (Rhys Vineyards)

The 2017 Santa Cruz Mountains bottling of pinot noir from Alesia is a bit lower in octane than the Anderson Valley version, coming in at 13.2 percent alcohol. The wine is absolutely stellar on the nose (and may well be the most beautiful bottle of wine I have yet tasted from Kevin Harvey and his team that wears the Alesia label), soaring from the glass in a very expressive and complex blend of dark berries, black plums, gamebird, raw cocoa, a touch of anise, very complex, gently autumnal soil tones, black tea, baking spices and just a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, light on its feet and nicely soil-driven, with modest tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is made from younger vines in some of the very best parcels owned by Rhys Vineyards, and though it does not have the inner core of those top bottlings, it has all of the personality and complexity! A great value! 2019-2050. **92.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Santa Lucia Highlands”- Clarice Wine Company (Monterey County)

Adam Lee is the proprietor of Clarice Wine Company, which takes its name from Adam’s grandmother, who was a great chef and whose aesthetic sensibilities have translated down to Adam and his winemaking style. The wine is produced primarily from fruit from Rosella’s Vineyard (roughly eighty-five percent), with the remainder from Gary’s Vineyard. It comes in at 14.4 percent octane and was raised in just over forty percent new wood. The bottling includes fifty-seven percent whole clusters and was fermented with indigenous yeasts, after a four day “cold soak” prior to the onset of fermentation. The wine is bottled under screwcap, so I gave it a good half an hour in decanter to really let it open up, even though it was not showing any particular signs of reduction at the present time. But, as this was my first tasting of Adam’s wines, I wanted to do my due diligence. The wine offers up superb aromatic complexity out of the blocks, delivering a fine, black fruity blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, raw cocoa, a lovely base of soil, gentle spice tones, woodsmoke and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a sappy core of fruit, lovely balance and grip, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and still quite youthful finish. I really wish Adam’s wines were bottled under natural cork, as I would love to follow them over many decades, but perhaps they will be the exception that age long and gracefully under screwcap. In any event, right now, there are no issues with the closure and this is dynamite pinot noir in the making! 2023-2065? **92+.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Gary’s Vineyard”- Clarice Wine Company (Monterey County)

Adam Lee buys fruit from two different blocks in Gary’s Vineyard, at opposite ends of the vineyard and previously, he has harvested these parcels as much as ten days apart. This year, he decided to bring them both in on the same day and co-ferment them, after a five day “cold soak”. The 2017 Gary’s Vineyard bottling from Adam Lee comes in at 14.3 percent alcohol and was fermented with fifty-five percent whole clusters this year, with the wine raised in two-thirds new oak and bottled unfinned and unfiltered. This is a cellar selection for Adam, with the casks that he chooses to not include in this bottling going into the Santa Lucia Highlands cuvée. The

wine is aromatically quite sophisticated, offering up an attractive and new oaky nose of plums, black cherries, a touch of dark chocolate, black tea, lovely soil tones (that will get nicely autumnal with bottle age), a touch of fresh thyme and a very well done framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and properly structured for the long haul, with a great core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and still quite primary finish. Again, this is under screwcap, but is showing great potential today. 2025-2075? **93+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Rosella’s Vineyard”- Clarice Wine Company (Monterey County)

The 2017 Rosella’s Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Clarice Wine Company is a lovely wine in the making. Like the above, Adam buys grapes from two sections of this vineyard, planted on different pinot noir clones, but chose in 2017 to harvest them the same day and co-ferment them. The wine ended up being fifty-eight percent whole clusters, was fermented with indigenous yeasts after a seven day “cold soak” and raised in just over eighty percent new barrels this year. It is a touch riper than the Gary’s Vineyard bottling, coming in at 14.6 percent. The wine offers up a lovely touch of red fruit in its bouquet of black cherries, raspberries, red plums, raw cocoa, a hint of tea-smoked duck, dark soil tones and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with a good structural chassis, a sound base of tannin and lovely focus and grip on the long, potentially plush and complex finish. I like this wine quite well, but I have to give a slight nod to Adam’s other two bottlings of pinot in 2017, as this shows just a touch of wood tannin on the backend that is not evident in either of the other two cuvées. There is not issue with balance over the long haul, but this bottling needs a bit more bottle age to fully integrate its new oak. 2024-2065? **92**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Eola-Amity Hills”- Franchere Wine Company (Eola-Amity Hills)

The 2017 Franchere “Eola-Amity Hills” bottling of pinot noir is beautifully cool in this vintage, coming in at 12.4 percent octane and was fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in all older casks prior to bottling. The wine is nicely black fruity on the nose, offering up scents of plums, black cherries, a nice touch of cocoa powder, dark soil tones, fresh nutmeg and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and has a good core of fruit, with moderate tannins, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the complex finish. There is just a touch of volatile acidity here on the palate, but decant the wine for fifteen minutes before serving it and it dissipates nicely and the wine opens up. This is a lovely bottle that is light on its feet, but delivers beautiful intensity of flavor. 2019-2040+. **90+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Famiglia”- de Lancellotti Family Vineyards (Chehalem Mountains)

The 2017 Pinot Noir “Famiglia” from Paul de Lancellotti is produced from fruit from the family’s own, biodynamically farmed vineyard. The wine comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and offers up a lovely touch of whole clusters in its aromatic constellation of cherries, beetroot, strawberries, a fine base of soil, just a whisper of youthful weediness from the stems and a topnote of dusty rose. On the palate the wine is tangy, full-bodied, focused and beautifully transparent, with a fine core of red fruit, lovely intensity of flavor, ripe tannins and a long, youthfully complex and very nicely balanced finish. This will need a few years in the cellar to start to blossom, but it will be excellent once it starts to stir. 2023-2050+. **91+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “La Corsia”- de Lancellotti Family Vineyards (Chehalem Mountains)

The La Corsia bottling from Paul de Lancellotti is produced from two different vineyards, the Arlyan and Lachini vineyards, both in Newburg. The wine is a touch riper than the Famiglia bottling, coming in at 13.7 percent, but offering up fine purity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet delivers a refined blend of black cherries, plums, cocoa powder, a touch of fresh herb

tones, a good signature of soil and a discreet base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and tightly-knit, with good depth at the core, fine focus and grip, tangy acids and a long, ripely tannic and still quite primary finish. This has broader shoulders than the Famiglia bottling and will demand more cellaring before it will start to blossom, but it has fine constituent components and should be a fine bottle in due course. Though there is a bit more depth and muscle here than in the Famiglia bottling, they are equally promising in different styles. 2025-2055. **91+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Onelia”- de Lancellotti Family Vineyards (Dundee Hills)

The Onelia bottling of pinot noir from the de Lancellotti Vineyards hails from vineyards in the Dundee Hills, rather than in the Chehalem Mountains AVA, and the cuvée comes in a touch cooler than the La Corsia at a very civilized 13.2 percent in 2017. The wine is quite promising on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a youthful and pure blend of red and black cherries, a hint of beetroot, woodsmoke, gamebird, a fine base of soil, a hint of mustard seed and cinnamon and a lovely, discreet framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely transparent, with a fine core, suave, buried tannins, tangy acids and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is going to be lovely with a bit of bottle age! 2023-2055. **92**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Lachini Vineyard”- de Lancellotti Family Vineyards (Chehalem Mtns)

The 2017 Pinot Noir “Lachini Vineyard” bottling from de Lancellotti Family Vineyards is a very pretty and red fruity wine, with a fairly light color and a complex and beautifully expressive bouquet of strawberries, cherries, lovely spice tones, roses, a fine base of soil, a dollop of cocoa powder and just a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely transparent, with plenty of depth at the core, suave tannins and lovely length and grip on the ripe and promising finish. This wine is 13.7 percent in octane, though it seems quite a bit lower in terms of its precise aromatics, but on the palate, the ripeness is more evident. I would have absolutely adored this wine a touch lower in octane, as the palate cannot quite keep pace (yet?) with the marvelous purity of the nose. But, that said, this is still a very tasty bottle of pinot noir. 2022-2045+? **90**.

2017 Pinot Noir- North 42 Degrees Winery (Lake Erie North Shore- Ontario)

The 2017 Pinot Noir from North 42 Degrees is bottled under a screwcap, so it needs some aeration to start to blossom once it is opened. With a bit of coaxing, the wine offers up a fine, black fruity nose of dark berries, black cherries, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke, a touch of pepper and a good base of dark soil elements. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely balanced, with moderate tannins, good focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. It shows just a bit weedy on the palate today, and I cannot decide if this is a reflection of the *terroir* or the choice of closure- as it could be a hint of reduction starting to clench up the palate. There are really good constituent components here and the wine really deserves a natural cork for a closure. 2023-2050. **88+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Durant Vineyard” Bishop Block- Patricia Green Cellars (Dundee Hills)

The 2017 Bishop Block pinot noir from Jim Anderson is outstanding. As readers may recall from my visit to the winery two years ago, the Bishop Block in Durant is the oldest parcel of vines in the vineyard, as this bottling hails from the original 1973 plantings of pinot noir here, all on Pommard clones. The wine was raised in one third new wood and is around fifty percent whole clusters, but with just under half of the cuvée having been fermented entirely with whole clusters and the slightly larger portion having only included twenty percent stems. The 2017 is beautifully expressive aromatically out of the blocks, offering up scents of black plums, black

cherries, grilled meats, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, a touch of fresh nutmeg, woodsmoke and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a rock solid core of fruit, great focus and grip, superb mineral drive and a very long, tangy and energetic finish. This recalls Echézeaux a bit to me, both in terms of some of its aromatic and flavor components and also in terms of its purity, intensity of flavor and urgency on the backend. It is a stunning young bottle of pinot! 2029-2065+. **94+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Estate Vyd.” Wadensvil Block- Patricia Green Cellars (Ribbon Ridge)

The vines in this section of the PGC Estate Vineyard were the first planted on the site, back in 1997, before Patty and Jim purchased the vineyard. The block was suffering when they took it over and it required lots of nurturing over the ensuing years to get the vines back to health (the first year PGC owned the vineyard, the fruit here was completely cut off from the vine in midsummer to try and resuscitate the health of the vines themselves!). It has progressed nicely in the last several years and saw its first “single parcel” bottling in the 2015 vintage. The 2017 version is just beautiful, wafting from the glass in a complex constellation of black cherries, raw cocoa, woodsmoke, black tea, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of fresh thyme, lavender and a delicate framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and intensely flavored, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip, excellent soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and very promising finish. There is a bit of whole cluster youthfulness on the backend that will want some cellaring to change to spice tones, but once the wine is ready to go, it is going to be rocking. 2026-2065. **93+**.



2017 Pinot Noir “Freedom Hill Vineyard” Coury Clone- Patricia Green Cellars

I love that Jim Anderson bottles different cuvées from a given vineyard based on clonal selection, as it is a beautiful way to see how different strains of pinot noir reflect the same underlying *terroir*. The Coury clones at Freedom Hill Vineyard were planted in 2000, so they are starting to round nicely into their mature years, and the 2017 version here comes in at 13.9 percent octane. The bouquet is beautifully expressive, offering up scents of cherries, beetroot, red plum, a fine base of soil, gentle spice tones and just a whisper of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively transparent for its octane, with a good core of fruit, suave tannins, tangy acids and just a hint of backend heat on the long and complex finish. Like all of Jim and Patty’s wines, this is built for the long haul and is still a puppy, but it has all of the constituent components in place to age long and gracefully. 2025-2055+. **91+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Freedom Hill Vineyard” Dijon 115 Clone- Patricia Green Cellars

The 2017 Dijon 115 Clone bottling from Freedom Hill is similarly ripe to the Coury Clone version, coming in at the same alcohol level, but it is decidedly different aromatically. This is a much more black fruity bouquet, offering up scents of black plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, a touch of gamebird, a dollop of the cola tones to come, a fine base of soil, a deft framing of new wood and a delicate floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and a touch more tightly-knit than the Coury Clone version, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the precise and nascently complex finish. It is interesting in that this too is 13.9 percent alcohol, yet it seems a tad cooler on the backend and is seamlessly balanced. This is first class juice for the cellar! 2025-2065. **93+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Freedom Hill Vineyard” Pommard Clone- Patricia Green Cellars

The Pommard Clone from the Freedom Hill Vineyard is just a whisper lower in alcohol this year than the other two versions, tipping the scales at 13.8 percent in 2017. The wine is beautifully pure and gently sappy on the nose, wafting from the glass in a combination of black cherries, sweet dark berries, raw cocoa, just a hint of gamebird, anise, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and exquisitely balanced, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil signature, fine-grained tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is a touch more reserved out of the blocks than the Dijon 115 version, but it has similar potential over the long haul and is going to be a dynamite bottle when it is fully mature. 2027-2065. **93+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Hyland Vineyard” Coury Clone- Patricia Green Cellars (McMinnville)

Hyland Vineyard was planted all the way back in 1972 and has been farmed biodynamically now for many years. It is a higher altitude vineyard and thus, is planted on volcanic Jory soils. The 2017 Coury Clone bottling of pinot noir from this vineyard is outstanding, delivering superb aromatic complexity in its blend of red and black cherries, black tea, just a whisper of beetroot, dark soil tones, a beautiful, Burgundian array of fresh herb tones, gentle smokiness and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, properly structured and very elegant in profile, with a superb core of fruit, marvelous soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and extremely promising finish. This is so beautifully balanced out of the blocks that it is approachable, but it really demands at least a decade in the cellar to really start to hit on all cylinders! 2027-2070. **94+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Notorious”- Patricia Green Cellars (Willamette Valley)

The 2017 Pinot Noir “Notorious” from Jim Anderson’s Patricia Green Cellars is a vineyard blend that includes fruit from Freedom Hill, Durant, Balcombe and the PGC Estate vineyards, and is raised a bit differently than the other wines from Jim, as the wine sees one

hundred percent new Cadus barrels for its *elevage*. The 2017 Notorious comes in at 13.8 percent and offers up a fine, youthful bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and that spicy, Cadus new oak tone. Cadus is owned by Louis Jadot, so if you are familiar with their red Burgundies, you know this oak shading quite well. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced, with a good core, fine grip and a long, moderately tannic and promising finish. I like this wine quite well, but it is a slight stylistic departure from the single vineyard, single block, single clone style of most of the other PGC pinots. 2025-2075. **92.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Olenik Vyd” Anklebreaker Block- Patricia Green Cellars (Chehalem Mt)

The 2017 Anklebreaker Block bottling of pinot noir from the Olenik Vineyard (the parcel takes its name from its extremely steep and rocky slope at the top of the vineyard) from Jim Anderson is excellent. This is one of his younger vine bottlings, as these vines only went in the ground in 2007, but the wine shows no signs of the easy-going nature of young vines and offers up impressive depth and structural conviction. The bouquet is a lovely, black fruity and youthful blend of plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, a really lovely touch of fresh thyme, stony soil tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely chewy, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex and promising finish. Give this excellent wine at least eight to ten years in the cellar to start to properly blossom. 2027-2060+. **92.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Weber Vineyard”- Patricia Green Cellars (Dundee Hills)

The 2017 Weber Vineyard bottling from Jim Anderson is one of his lower octane pinots in this vintage, coming in at a cool 13.3 percent. This is all Pommard clones and was planted in 1978, making the vines a lovely thirty-five years of age in 2017. Half the wine was fermented entirely whole cluster, with the other half only including twenty percent stems. The wine is fairly light in color and loaded with personality, wafting from the glass in a refined, red fruity blend of cherries, beetroot, lovely soil tones, a hint of bergamot, raw cocoa, a nice touch of youthful stems, woodsmoke and a discreet framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very transparent in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, great focus and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is a puppy and needs some time in the cellar to blossom properly, but it is going to be stellar when it is ready to drink! 2027-2065. **94.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Alpine Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2017 Alpine Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Kevin Harvey, Jeff Brinkman and their team at Rhys is flat out gorgeous in this vintage. The bouquet is already hitting on all cylinders, wafting from the glass in a complex and elegant blend of black cherries, black plums, dark chocolate, complex soil tones, a touch of *pigeon*, lovely spice tones, a dollop of new wood and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is very pure, refined and full-bodied, with lovely sappiness down at the core, excellent mineral drive, blossoming complexity, fine-grained tannins and a long, vibrant and very classy finish. This is a great pinot noir in the making. 2024-2060. **94+.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Alpine Hillside”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2017 Alpine Hillside pinot from Kevin Harvey and his very talented team at Rhys is about as complex a young pinot noir as I have seen in a few years. Though the vintage in general may produce fairly plush and accessible pinot bottlings early on from the estate, this gorgeous Alpine Hillside is built for the long haul and is going to be a brilliant wine when it is fully ready to drink. The bouquet is cool and very, very promising, offering up a nascently complex and

almost exotic aromatic constellation of black cherries, sweet dark berries, raw cocoa, gamebird, complex soil tones, chicory, beautifully subtle spice tones (cardamom and clove?), cedar, just a touch of whole cluster fresh herb tones and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full and focused, with great transparency and lift, exquisite balance and grip, suave tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is so beautifully balanced out of the blocks that it is all too easy to drink right now, but there is so much wrapped up here behind its refined structural chassis that I would try not to touch a bottle for a decade and really experience the whole panoply of aromatic and flavor complexity. This is a brilliant wine! 2027-2060. **96**

2017 Pinot Noir “Bearwallow Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Anderson Valley)

The 2017 vintage of Bearwallow pinot noir is fairly ripe for a Rhys wine, coming in at 13.8 percent octane, but this exemplifies what Kevin Harvey said about “each vineyard reacting differently” to the Labor Day heat wave and the wine is beautifully pure and succulent. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very complex combination of black cherries, black plums, dark soil tones, raw cocoa, a hint of fresh nutmeg, a dollop of savory elements, woodsmoke, a discreet base of vanillin oak and just a hint of the cola that will come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, plush and full-bodied, with a beautiful undertow of soil tones to go with just succulent fruit, fine-grained tannins and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This is lovely and quite forward in style, but with the balance to also age quite gracefully. 2019-2055. **92.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Home Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2017 Home Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Rhys is very refined on both the nose and palate. The wine offers up a very pure and complex nose of sweet dark berries, black cherries, cola, a touch of chicory, dark soil tones, a bit of gamebird, gentle new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, complex and nicely reserved in structural profile, with a fine core, ripe, gently chewy tannins and very good length and grip on the tangy and nascently complex finish. This is one Rhys 2017 pinot cuvée that will demand some bottle age to start to blossom, but it will be just fine when it is ready to go. 2023-2055. **92.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Horseshoe Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The Horseshoe Vineyard seems to have done just fine in the heat of 2017, as the pinot noir here has come in at a cool 12.7 percent octane. Aromatically, the wine is already very expressive and offers up a complex constellation of red and black cherries, a hint of pomegranate, lovely, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke, a classy base of soil, just a hint of the cola to come and a very discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full and very classy, with a nice sense of mid-palate sappiness, suave, moderate tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is more red fruity in personality than the lovely 2016 version, and somewhat atypical of Horseshoe pinot noir, it is already really a delicious glass of wine and there would not be a lot of remorse drinking it early on. Certainly, more complexity will come with bottle age and this has the balance to evolve long and gracefully, but the temptation to drink it in the bloom of youth is going to be a bit stronger than customary for this bottling in 2017! 2022-2055. **93.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Horseshoe Hillside”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2017 Pinot Noir “Horseshoe Hillside” bottling from Rhys Vineyards is, not surprisingly, still a very youthful wine and is presently a bit marked by its whole clusters on both the nose and palate. But, with a bit of air, the other elements start to emerge and fill in the missing aromatic details, and eventually the wine offers up a stellar nose of black plums, sweet

dark berries, vinesmoke, a complex base of dark soil tones, a bit of black tea, gamebird and gentle savory notes in the upper register that will probably get more spicy than savory as the wine ages. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a gorgeous core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, fine-grained tannins and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is more backward than the regular bottling of Horseshoe, as well as a bit higher octane at 13.4 percent, and it needs some cellaring time to start to blossom. However, once it really gets rolling, it is going to be a superb bottle! 2027-2060+. **94+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Mount Pajaro Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

This is the first release of pinot noir from the Mount Pajaro Vineyard that I have seen from Rhys and it is quite lovely in 2017. The bouquet is a very classy blend of sweet dark berries, black cherries, a nice touch of Gevrey-like grilled meat, raw cocoa, dark soil tones and a bit of new wood. On the palate the wine is quite pure, fullish and complex, with lovely focus and grip, good, but not great depth at the core, fine-grained tannins and a long, vibrant and very classy finish. I assume this is younger vines and hence, the wine does not quite have the same mid-palate stuffing of some of the earlier-planted vineyards, but there is tons of personality here and this is a very welcome new addition to the Rhys pinot noir lineup! It will be a star in due course. 2019-2050+. **92+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Porcupine Hill”- Rhys Vineyards (Anderson Valley)

The 2017 Porcupine Hill bottling of pinot is another of the riper wines in the Rhys lineup this year, coming in at 13.8 percent, as is the case with the Bearwallow Vineyard cuvée. The wine is very enticing on the nose, with just a touch of the exotic in its bouquet of black raspberries, black plums, chicory, lovely minerality, gamebird, woodsmoke, a hint of lead pencil and a deft base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with fine mineral drive, ripe, buried tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and very classy finish. Though this is exactly the same octane as the Bearwallow this year, it seems to me a touch more precise and pure on the backend. Fine juice that is approachable, but could do with at least a couple of years in the cellar to let the tannins fall away just a bit more. Fine juice. 2022-2060. **93+**.

2017 Pinot Noir “Skyline Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2017 Pinot Noir “Skyline Vineyard” bottling from Rhys Vineyards is just beautiful this year. It exhibits picture-perfect ripeness at 12.9 percent and delivers great vibrancy and purity in its aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, black plums, raw cocoa, a hint of gamebird, lovely soil complexity, a bit of bonfire and a lovely foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is suave, full-bodied, focused and beautifully transparent, with a sappy core, lovely structural tension, modest tannins and a very long, very pure and extremely classy finish. This is dynamite young pinot noir, but like many of the Rhys 2017s, it is not going to demand any extended period of hibernation before it becomes utterly riveting in the glass! 2021-2055. **94.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Swan Terrace”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The tiny subsection of the Alpine Vineyard, Swan Terrace is one of the coolest customers in the stellar Rhys pinot noir lineup in 2017, as the wine tips the scales at 12.5 percent. Despite its lower octane, it has one of the biggest personalities in the range this year and is absolutely stellar, delivering a very classy aromatic constellation of dark berries, black plums, raw cocoa, beautiful minerality, gamebird, just a hint of fresh nutmeg and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and intensely flavored, with a good core, excellent transparency and grip, moderate tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is going to

be a suave middleweight when it is ready to drink and will age very long and gracefully. 2024-2060. **94.**

2017 Pinot Noir “English Hill”- The Withers (Sonoma Coast)

As was the case last year, the 2017 English Hill bottling of pinot noir is the lowest octane version of this varietal from The Withers in this vintage, coming in at a cool 12.8 percent alcohol. The wine delivers lovely early complexity in its bouquet of cherries, red berries, a touch of beetroot, a Morey St. Denis-like touch of mustard seed, a refined base of soil, gentle smokiness and a whisper of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely light on its feet, with a good core, fine balance and grip and a long, nascently complex, gently tannic and quite classy finish. This is already quite tasty today, but it is still a puppy and a few years in the cellar will allow its secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge and it will certainly reward a modicum of patience! Fine juice. 2023-2055. **91+.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Oppenlander Vineyard”- The Withers (Mendocino County)

The 2017 Oppenlander Vineyard pinot noir bottling from Andrew Tow at The Withers is a lovely and sappy wine, resplendent in its classic Mendocino personality on both the nose and palate. The pure and sappy bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of cherries, beetroot, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke, a nice touch of classic Mendocino weediness and just a hint of the cola tones to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a sappy core, good soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, nascently complex and nicely focused finish. This comes in listed at 13.8 percent octane and shows it a touch on the backend, but there is a lot to like here and given a few years in the cellar, this should blossom very well indeed. 2022-2050. **88.**

2017 Pinot Noir “Peters Vineyard”- The Withers (Sonoma Coast)

The 2017 Peters Vineyard cuvée of pinot noir from The Withers is a lovely young wine in the making. The bouquet is deep, pure and nicely expressive out of the blocks, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, beetroot, woodsmoke, a touch of raw cocoa, beautiful soil tones, a touch of mustard seed and a very discreet framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a good core, excellent soil inflection, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and gently ripe finish. This is a touch higher in alcohol than the Oppenlander bottling, coming in at 13.9 percent, but it seems cooler and tangier in personality and I think it carries its ripeness a bit more seamlessly. Good juice. 2023-2060. **90+.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Oak Ridge Vineyard”- Analemma (Columbia Gorge)

Steven Thompson’s 2016 pinot from the Oak Ridge Vineyard is pretty ripe, coming in at 13.8 percent octane, but offering lovely purity on both the nose and palate. The wine included a large percentage of whole clusters and was raised entirely in used oak casks for fourteen months prior to bottling. The youthful nose offers up lovely promise in its blend of cherries, strawberries, a hint of cranberry, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones, gamebird, a fine base of soil and a nice touch of youthful stems that are going to turn to cinnamon notes in the not too distant future. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and beautifully soil-driven, with a full-bodied and impeccably balanced format, well-measure tannins, tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and classy finish. This needs a few years in the cellar to start hitting on all cylinders, but it is going to be outstanding when it is ready for primetime. 2026-2055+. **92.**



2016 Pinot Noir “Lester Family Vineyard”- Big Basin Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2016 Lester Family Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Big Basin Vineyards is an excellent wine on both the nose and palate. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane and was made with one hundred percent whole clusters, fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in twenty-five percent new oak for eighteen months prior to bottling without fining or filtering. The nose still has a whisper of youthful stemminess in its complex blend of red and black cherries, cola, woodsmoke, a bit of gamebird, a fine base of soil tones and a very gentle foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, suave, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and very promising finish. The 2016 Lester Family Vineyard bottling from Big Basin is certainly approachable today, but it is still a toddler and I would try to tuck it away in the cellar for at least the next five years and really let it start to come into its own. It is a lovely wine. 2024-2055+. **92.**

2016 Pinot Noir “Old Corral”- Big Basin Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The Old Corral bottling from Big Basin is one of their estate vineyard bottlings, as the fruit for this wine hail from three different blocks of pinot noir owned by the winery. The soils here are much rockier than in the Lester Family vineyard (witness the two other blocks besides the Old Corral are named Boulder Block and Rocky Blocks), and the wine is a touch lower in octane than the Lester Family bottling, coming in at a svelte 13.2 percent. It is made entirely with whole clusters, indigenous yeasts and again, aged eighteen months in cask, with a quarter of the barrels new. The bouquet is pure and very refined out of the blocks, offering up scents of black

cherries, chicory, gamebird, complex, stony soil tones, a dollop of fresh thyme, a discreet framing of new wood and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and nicely transparent, with a good core of fruit, moderate, seamless tannins, good acids and fine length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This is a bit more tightly-knit out of the blocks than the Lester Family bottling, but my gut feeling is that with sufficient bottle age, this may just nose out the Lester for pride of place in 2016. It is going to be a lovely wine for a long time! 2025-2055+. **92+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Willamette Valley”- Nicolas Jay (Willamette Valley)

It has been a year since I last tasted the 2016 “Willamette Valley” bottling of pinot noir from Nicolas Jay and the wine has started to blossom a bit, but it is still in that youthful stage and is still several years away from its true apogee of peak drinkability. That said, it is already quite tasty, offering up a beautifully expressive bouquet of plums, cherries, beetroot, a touch of cocoa powder, woodsmoke, soil tones, gamebird and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a sappy core, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and very well balanced finish. If you opt for drinking this wine today in its lovely blush of youth, give it at least half an hour in decanter to open up a bit; for those with requisite patience, the wine is likely to really start hitting on all cylinders five to ten years from now and drink for several decades. 2021-2055. **92+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Estate”- Porter Creek Vineyards (Russian River Valley)

The 2016 Estate bottling of Porter Creek pinot noir is a lovely bottle, coming in at a civilized 13.4 percent octane and offering up a very, very classy bouquet of red plums, cherries, a whisper of beetroot, raw cocoa, a fine base of soil, gentle spice tones, a dollop of cedar and lovely smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a sappy core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is first class pinot noir that is immensely enjoyable today, though it is still in climbing mode and will be even better five to ten years down the road. *Chapeau!* 2019-2060. **92**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Fiona Hill Vineyard”- Porter Creek Vineyards (Russian River Valley)

I do not know how many winegrowers in Sonoma are farming biodynamically these days, but Alex Davis has been doing so for several years now and the wines seem to really speak more eloquently of their underlying *terroir* as a result. The 2016 Fiona Hill bottling of pinot noir is a first class follow-up to the superb 2015 version, coming in at a similar octane to last year’s bottling and delivering a fine aromatic constellation of cherries, pomegranate, a hint of mustard seed, lovely and quite complex soil tones, gamebird, a touch of woodsmoke, incipient spice elements and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and nicely structured for the long haul, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a long, youthful and very promising finish. This is still a puppy and needs five to eight years in the cellar to start to really blossom, but it is going to be a superb bottle in the fullness of time. 2024-2065. **92+**.

2016 Pinot Noir “Tondre Grapefield”- Ser Winery (Santa Lucia Highlands)

The 2016 Pinot Noir “Tondre Grapefield” bottling from Nicole Walsh’s Ser Winery is a lovely wine in every aspect but one, it is bottled under screwcap. The bottle I sampled took a while to blow off a bit of reductive stinkiness, but did so in time to reveal a deep and classy bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, a good base of soil, a touch of cola, gentle spice tones and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure on the attack, fullish, elegant and complex, with a good core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, modest tannins and a

whisper of asparagus tones just starting to poke out on the long finish (and which are from the closure). I do not like the slightly pinched textural impression also found the backend now from incipient reduction. Nicole's day job is as one of the winemakers at Bonny Doon, so I suspect she is not going to turn her back on screwcaps anytime soon, which is too bad, as there is a terrific wine here under the screw. The reductive shadings here can be waited out in the decanter right now, but for how long? My score will remain accurate until the permanent reduction sets in, which may be anywhere from one to three years in my estimation, so drink this wine sooner, rather than later, as with aeration, there is a lot to like here! 2019-2023+? **91.**

2016 Pinot Noir "Charles Vineyard"- The Withers (Anderson Valley)

The 2016 Pinot Noir "Charles Vineyard" bottling from The Withers is always held back an additional year in the cellar prior to release, so this is coming out of the cellars alongside of the other 2017 bottlings. The wine is nicely measured, weighing in at 13.3 percent octane and offering up a refined aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, bonfire, a bit of roasted gamebird, dark soil tones, raw cocoa, black tea and a discreet foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and shows off excellent intensity of flavor without undue weight, with an excellent core, lovely balance and grip, moderate, seamless tannins and a very long, youthful and complex finish. This is a bit more structured out of the blocks than the other Withers pinot cuvées and needs some time to allow the tannins to soften up a bit more, but it is going to be outstanding and is truly an exceptional bottle of Anderson Valley pinot noir. 2024-2065. **93.**

2015 Pinot Noir "Belle Pente Vineyard"- Belle Pente Vineyard (Yamhill-Carlton)

The Belle Pente home vineyard was planted on a range of different clones starting in 1994 (last vines went into the ground in 1999), on a marine sedimentary soil base over hard sandstone. The vineyard is densely planted at elevations from three hundred to five hundred feet above sea level. The bunches were nearly all destemmed, the wine fermented with native yeasts after a short cold soak and *elevage* was in one-third new casks. The 2015 comes in at 14.2 percent alcohol and offers up a refined nose of red and black cherries, a touch of chocolate, woodsmoke, gentle spice tones, vanillin oak and just a whisper of the cola notes to come with extended bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very elegant in profile, with a sappy core, fine soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is nicely built for the long haul and deserves some time in the cellar to properly blossom. It will be long-lived and outstanding when it is ready to drink! 2025-2075. **93+.**

2015 Pinot Noir "Murto Vineyard"- Belle Pente Vineyard (Dundee Hills)

The 2015 Murto Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Brian O'Donnell's Belle Pente Vineyard is from a parcel of hillside vines that are planted on *franc de pied* and date back to 1978. The grapes were completely destemmed and given a four day "cold soak" prior to the onset of fermentation, which was done entirely with indigenous yeasts, and the wine was raised in thirty-seven percent new oak, with most of the other barrels three to five years of age. It was bottled unfinned and unfiltered after eighteen months of *elevage* and offers up a beautiful bouquet of plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, a fine base of soil tones, woodsmoke, just a wisp of fresh thyme and a discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and sappy at the core, with excellent focus and balance, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. 2015 was a hot summer and, as a result, the wine comes in at 14.3 percent octane, but carries its alcohol very well indeed and has outstanding potential. I

would tuck it away for five to seven years before even thinking about popping a bottle, just to let the tannins fall away a bit and the secondary layering to emerge. 2024-2055+. **92.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Estate Reserve”- Belle Pente Vineyard (Yamhill-Carleton)

The 2015 Estate Reserve bottling from Brian O'Donnell is also produced entirely from the Belle Pente Vineyard. The wine includes six percent whole clusters in this vintage and was raised in fifty percent new oak, following similar fermentation techniques to the other two bottlings above. Like all of Brian's wines, it is bottled unfinned and unfiltered. It is a classic example of the hot summer of 2015, coming in at 14.6 percent alcohol, but retaining lovely purity and lift in its aromatic constellation of plums, cherries, raw cocoa, a touch of gamebird, fresh nutmeg, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and fairly powerful in personality, with a fine chassis of ripe tannins, good focus and grip, lovely soil signature and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This carries its alcohol very well and seems cooler than its 14.6 percent octane, but it is a properly structured wine and is going to need some time alone in the cellar to blossom. 2027-2075. **94.**



This photo of the Trenton Estate Vineyard perfectly captures the rolling hills of vines in the Russian River Valley.

2015 Pinot Noir “La Cruz Vineyard”- Côte West (Sonoma Coast)

The La Cruz Vineyard is in the cool Petaluma Gap area, and this lovely 2015 pinot noir from Brett Hogan evidences this, as it comes in at 13.3 percent octane. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet of cherries, beetroot, cinnamon, woodsmoke, raw cocoa, good soil tones and a hint of fresh dill in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off a good structural chassis and impressive mid-palate depth, with ripe tannins, good focus and grip, lovely transparency and a long, nascently complex finish. This is a very good bottle in the making that needs some time in the cellar to start to really blossom, but the potential is self-evident and this is going to be a very good glass of wine with a bit of patience. 2022-2055. **92.**

2015 Pinot Noir “Estate Bottled”- Mount Eden Vineyard (Santa Cruz Mountains)

Jeffrey Patterson’s 2015 estate bottling of pinot noir is flat out gorgeous on both the nose and palate, and though the wine is unequivocally built for long and graceful cellaring, it is already very, very easy to drink! It comes in at a nicely ripe 13.5 percent octane and offers up a deep and very complex bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, raw cocoa, a great base of soil, a touch of black tea, lovely spices notes of nutmeg and clove and a discreet foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, and rock solid at the core, with superb mineral drive, great length and grip, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is first class pinot noir with grand cru-like palate authority! 2019-2060+. **94.**

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

The 2014 Swan Terrace is very classically low octane, as is customary with this bottling from Rhys. I had not tasted it since its release and was very happy to cross paths with it recently. The wine is still quite youthful, as one would expect from this cuvée at age five, but it is starting to show some signs of secondary development and is certainly not shut down. The bouquet offers up a lovely and smoky constellation of sweet dark berries, a touch of plum, gamebird, dark soil tones, bitter chocolate, woodsmoke, cedar and a lovely, gently blossoming topnote of botanicals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and suavely tannic, with a lovely core, good soil signature, tangy acids and lovely balance and grip on the long and complex finish. This is not into its apogee of peak maturity by any stretch of the imagination, but even in its adolescence, it is drinking with great style! 2019-2055. **94.**

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

The 2013 Bearwallow Vineyard pinot noir from Rhys Vineyards is starting to drink very nicely, though like the 2014 Swan Terrace, it is still in climbing mode and will be even better with further bottle age. Today, the bouquet is starting to show the first signs of secondary layering, wafting from the glass in a fine mix of black cherries, dark berries, lovely spice tones, a fine base of dark soil, fresh herb tones, cedar, hints of the cola to come and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and starting to get nicely velvety on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, fine transparency and grip, fine-grained, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. I had no trouble drinking this wine today, but it is going to be even better with another five years or more in the cellar. 2019-2050+. **94.**

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

The 2013 vintage of Family Farm pinot noir is really starting to blossom nicely and this might be the first of the single vineyards I would reach for right now for current drinking from Rhys. The bouquet is deep, pure and beautifully black fruity today, offering up scents of black plums, dark berries, raw cocoa, gamebird, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, hints of the cola notes to come and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely sappy at the core, with good soil signature, suave, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex and really quite wide open finish. This still has decades and decades of life ahead of it, but, it is already starting to drink with great aplomb. 2019-2050. **94.**



Zinfandel

2016 Nalle Zinfandel (Dry Creek Valley)

Doug Nalle's 2016 Zinfandel bottling is composed of eighty-eight percent zinfandel, seven percent petite sirah and five percent carignane. It comes in at 13.7 percent octane, which by contemporary zinfandel standards, is quite reasonable. The wine is obviously still young and is a bit jammy when first poured as a result, but with some aeration really starts to snap into focus and offer up scents of black raspberries, cigar smoke, pepper, lovely soil tones that will go autumnal in profile with some bottle age, hung game and a lovely array of spice elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and seems like it still has a bit or residual sweetness on the backend (which I much prefer to higher octane!), with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins, ripe, tangy acids and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is not a bad drink at all out of the blocks, but it will be a far more serious customer with five or six years' worth of bottle age. Fine juice. 2024-2055. **91+**.

2015 Sky Vineyards "Half'n" Napa Valley Red Table Wine (Mount Veeder)

This is the first time I have tasted Sky Vineyards' "Half'n" Red Table Wine, which is a fifty-fifty blend of zinfandel and syrah that are fermented together. The 2015 Half'n comes in at a very civilized 13.2 percent alcohol and offers up a youthfully complex bouquet of cassis, a potpourri of brambly spice tones, pepper, roasted meats, bonfire and a fine base of mountain soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit youthfully stemmy, with a fine

core of fruit, good soil signature, a fair bit of chewy tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. This needs some time in the cellar to soften up a bit, but it will be quite tasty when it is ready to go. 2024-2055. **89.**

2013 Sky Vineyards Zinfandel (Mount Veeder)

As I noted last summer, the 2013 Sky Zinfandel is a first class bottle and every bit as fine an example of Mount Veeder *terroir* as those illustrious cabernets made just up the hill at Mayacamas! The bouquet is pure, soil-driven and complex and shows just how serious this varietal can be in the right hands, as it wafts from the glass in a classy blend of black raspberries, spit-roasted game, fine mountain soil tones, cigar smoke and a panoply of exotic spice elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely transparent, with a lovely core of fruit, suave, moderate tannins, tangy acids and great focus and grip on the complex and very, very promising finish. This is a serious, relatively low octane zinfandel (13.4 percent) that is going to age long and gracefully, and though it is quite approachable today, its promise is too good to drink it without at least a bit more bottle age! I am late to the party for these lovely Sky Vineyards Zinfandel, but they are some of the most beautiful examples of this varietal still made in all of California and I cannot wait to visit the winery and really get a feel for what is going on here, as it is all very, very good! 2023-2065. **93.**

1984 Joseph Swan Vineyards “Northern Sonoma” Zinfandel

The 1984 “Northern Sonoma” Zinfandel from Joseph Swan Vineyards is interesting in that there is no mention of an alcohol level on the label anywhere, which I have found on some other older vintages of Swan wines, but never expected to find this with a wine as relatively recent as a 1984! In any case, the wine is beautifully classical in style (one would not expect anything less from Rod Berglund!), offering up a complex and vibrant bouquet of raspberries, a touch of fruitcake, gorgeous spice elements, a nice touch of eucalyptus, smoked meats and a lovely base of discreetly autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with excellent focus and grip, a sappy core of fruit, melted tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. I would guess that this is around 13.5 percent octane, based on how beautifully balanced it is at age twenty-five. First class zinfandel that is now at its peak, but still with decades of life still in it! 2019-2050. **93.**

1975 Cuvaion “Napa Valley” Zinfandel

The 1975 Cuvaion “Napa Valley” Zinfandel is absolutely *à point* and is drinking with great beauty and resolution. The wine is only 12.3 percent alcohol, which is probably the reason that it is still so enjoyable at nearly forty years of age, as it is a perfectly balanced and very complex middleweight that belies today’s fantasy that zinfandel will not age gracefully. The bouquet is deep, complex and vibrant in its mélange of desiccated raspberries, red currants, beautiful spice tones redolent of cardamom and cloves, sweet cigar wrapper and soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, just a whisper of remaining tannin, a fine core of sweet fruit and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This was my second of two bottles I bought at auction a couple of years ago, and both were excellent. Just a lovely bottle of old zinfandel with plenty of life still in it. 2014-2025. **91.**

1974 Cuvaision “Sonoma” Zinfandel

1974 was Philip Togni’s first vintage at Cuvaision, and for the first several years that he was at the winery, all of the Cuvaision wines were made from purchased grapes. Consequently, the 1974 Zinfandel was made from grapes sourced in Sonoma County, as opposed to the 1975 above, which hailed from a vineyard source in the Napa Valley. However, while these two old Cuvaision zins were made from different parcels, they share the very high quality of all of Philip Togni’s wines. The 1974 Zinfandel is a bit higher octane than the svelte ‘75, as it tips the scales at 13.8 percent alcohol, but it has aged beautifully and at age forty-five is still drinking at the top of its game, offering up a deep, complex and perfectly-resolved bouquet of black raspberries, fruitcake, lavender, gentle notes of eucalyptus, cigar smoke, a hint of saddle leather and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine pure, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with lovely transparency and focus, melted tannins and a long, complex and very refined finish. Philip Togni just made beautiful wines during his tenure at Cuvaision! 2019-2040+. **93.**

**THE 2016s FROM NICOLAS POTEL'S
DOMAINE DE BELLENE AND MAISON ROCHE DE BELLENE**



It is a very rare thing when a Burgundian producer and his US importer send bottled samples to a journalist, but a couple of months ago, my back door was graced with a Fed Ex driver carrying two cases of the recently-released 2016s from Nicolas Potel's Domaine de Bellene and Maison Roche de Bellene. My heartfelt thanks goes out to Monsieur Potel and his US importer, Loosen Brothers, for being so kind as to send such a superb lineup of 2016 red and white Burgundies. As readers will recall, 2016 was a frost-shortened crop and bottlings from the most-affected vineyard parcels were in very short supply in this vintage, so the generosity of Messieurs Potel and Loosen were truly extraordinary to send such a fine lineup of wines in just such a vintage. I had only visited Nicolas Potel on one previous occasion in his cellars just outside of the *peripherique* in Beaune, and that tasting had not gone all that well, as Monsieur Potel had been entertaining his Australian importer and their best clients the evening before and was on his way to the airport that afternoon for an international trip, so things were rather hurried during my visit. As I had not found time to squeeze in another visit to the Maison Roche de Bellene cellars during my densely-packed visits in the last couple of years, I was very grateful to have an opportunity to taste such a wide array of bottlings from the *maison* here in my office in New York.

The Potel family's history in Burgundy has been something of a roller coaster in the last quarter century. Nicolas' father, Gérard Potel, was the very, very highly-respected *Régisseur* of Domaine de la Pousse d'Or in Volnay for all of his career, having taken over the reins at this important estate in the 1964 vintage. During *Père* Potel's tenure at Domaine de la Pousse d'Or, this was unequivocally one of the greatest domaines in all of Burgundy and his exemplary track record produced hundreds of brilliant wines down through the years. But, Monsieur Potel was an employee at Domaine de la Pousse d'Or, and when new owners came in during the mid-1990s, Gérard Potel was eventually forced out at the domaine. His son Nicolas had been training at wineries in other countries during his father's last few vintages at Domaine de la Pousse d'Or (including several stints in Australia and one with Tom Dehlinger in Sonoma County, interspersed with *stages* back in Burgundy with people like Christophe Roumier and Thierry Matrot), so when he returned to Burgundy full-time in 1996 after his *stages* abroad and at other Burgundy domaines, it was with the goal to start a *négociant* business with his father. However, Gérard Potel passed away suddenly of a heart attack the following year, without having been able to get anything going with Nicolas. Nicolas Potel was still able to start slowly on his own, with many of the very top *vignerons* in the region offering to sell him some of their grapes to help him in those early years, as the prevailing opinion in Burgundy was that the Potel family had been treated very badly during the endgame at Domaine de la Pousse d'Or. Nicolas was even able to buy some grapes from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti in those early days- that is how deep the sympathy went for him and his mother in the wake of Gérard Potel's sudden passing.

It was an incremental process in those early years for Nicolas, but people liked the wines of Maison Nicolas Potel and slowly his *négociant* business was able to grow nicely from the late 1990s through the first few years of the new century. But, the recession of 2002 and 2003 hit him hard, as he was rather extended (producing more than a hundred different, small batch wines by this time), so he brought in investors in the middle of the decade for Maison Nicolas Potel, selling a majority interest in the business, but staying on as managing winemaker. His new partners were the Cottin brothers of Maison Labourée-Roi, a much larger *négociant* firm, but the brothers and Nicolas did not necessarily share the same vision for the business and eventually, Nicolas was dismissed in 2009. To make matters even tougher on him, he no longer had the right to use his own name on his wines, as that was copyrighted to the business that was now owned by the Cottin brothers! He was forty years of age when his parting ways with the Cottin brothers and Maison Nicolas Potel came to pass and he had to start all over again from scratch! Persistence being a serious strength of Nicolas', he started a new venture, Maison Roche de Bellene for his new *négociant* firm, and as opportunity allowed, Domaine Roche de Bellene for parcels of vines he was able to buy along the way and start building up his own small domaine as well.

In addition to his *négociant* bottlings produced today under the Maison Roche de Bellene label, Nicolas also has his relatively new estate vineyard cuvées produced under his Domaine de Bellene label (it is easy to distinguish between the two, as if you look at the photo at the start of the article, the estate-bottled wines have a drawing of the domaine on the label and are sealed with wax, instead of an aluminum capsule), which originated when one of the growers he was buying fruit from decided that he would prefer to retire and have Nicolas take over the farming of his vineyards. These parcels, which originally totaled 13.85 hectares, were situated primarily in Savigny-lès-Beaune, Beaune and Saint-Romain to begin with (if memory serves me correctly)

and became the vineyard foundation of the Domaine de Bellene in 2005. These original parcels include a dazzling array of top flight premier crus in both Beaune and Savigny. A few more prime plots of vines have been added to the domaine over the years to this original purchase, including a twenty-one *ares* parcel in the Vosne-Romanée premier cru of les Suchots, fourteen *ares* in Nuits St. Georges “les Chaignots”, just under a third of a hectare in Vosne-Romanée *villages* level parcel of les Quartiers de Nuits (with these very old vines planted in 1927!) and a touch more than two hectares of sixty-nine year-old vines in Nuits St. Georges AC (which produce one of Nicolas’ finest domaine bottlings, his Nuits St. Georges “Vieilles Vignes”). Beyond his work running the *négociant* business of Maison Roche de Bellene and his Domaine de Bellene, Nicolas Potel has also developed a collection of aged Burgundies that he sources from various cellars in the region. This is called his Bellenum Collection, which has witnessed small releases of various wines under this label all the way back to the 1959 vintage under this project. As the businesses have grown, Nicolas has been working with Sylvain Debord, who handles both oversight of the vineyards and the winemaking for both the *négociant* business and Domaine de Bellene.



Nicolas Potel outside the front door of his Domaine de Bellene in Beaune.

The 2016 samples from Monsieur Potel have been resting comfortably in my cellar for a few months now, as I was so inundated with other samples for features which I was working on in the last few issues that I never had time to open these wines. One can imagine how frustrating it is to go down in the cellar and see samples of wines such as Volnay “Clos des Chênes”, Nuits St. Georges “Boudots” or Vosne-Romanée “Suchots” and know that there is no way you will have time to taste them in the coming month or two! But, finally I was able to clear the decks a

little bit after Issue 81 and these 2016s were every bit worth the wait. Like all *négociant* lineups, some wines from Monsieur Potel are a bit stronger than others, and this is particularly true in the frost-affected vintage of 2016, but there are an awful lot of really superb wines reviewed in the notes that follow. While I only had a chance to taste a few of his Domaine de Bellene wines from his own vineyards, the ones that I tried were consistently excellent examples of their respective appellations, with special kudos for the outstanding Nuits St. Georges “Vieilles Vignes” bottling, which was undoubtedly of premier cru quality. In fact, the top wines in the range that were sent to me were so good that somehow or another, I am going to have to try to find a time slot in my busy schedule when in Beaune to pay another visit to the cellars here and taste *sur place* on one of these upcoming trips!

Maison Roche de Bellene Vins Blancs

2016 Bourgogne Chardonnay “Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Roche de Bellene

The 2016 Bourgogne Chardonnay “Vieilles Vignes” from Maison Roche de Bellene is made from vines that average fifty years of age, with the vineyard parcels located in both the Côte de Beaune and Côte Chalonnaise. The wine saw just a touch of new oak (three percent) and offers up a fine bouquet of white peach, a touch of pineapple, stony soil tones (quite reminiscent of Rully in this regard), spring flowers and an exotic topnote of fresh coconut. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and quite solid at the core, with good acids and grip, fine balance and a long, surprisingly complex finish. This is a good example of Bourgogne blanc. 2019-2025+. **88.**

2016 Saint-Véran- Maison Roche de Bellene

The 2016 Saint-Véran from Maison Roche de Bellene is produced from a parcel of forty year-old vines and was fermented with indigenous yeasts. It sees no new casks during its *élevage*. The wine offers up a good bouquet of apple, a touch of fresh pineapple, chalky soil tones and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite deep at the core, with good focus and balance, bright, framing acids and very good length and grip on the succulent finish. This has a bit of the concentration of the vintage, but still remains light on its feet and will drink well for the next year or two. A good, solid effort. 2019-2022. **88.**

2016 Saint-Aubin - Maison Roche de Bellene

The 2016 Saint-Aubin from Nicolas Potel was raised in ten percent new oak and hails from a vineyard that is closing in on fifty years of age. The commune of Saint-Aubin was quite heavily frost-damaged in 2016, so I am sure this wine came from quite low yields as a result. The wine has a nice, complex bouquet, but it is fairly deeply-pitched in profile and I assume this is from the frost damage, as it offers up notes of baked peaches, a touch of fallen apple, hazelnuts, chalky soil and a bit of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite concentrated from its low yields, with solid acids and good focus and grip on the long and wide open finish. Some 2016 whites lack a bit of energy and snap from the frost damage and this is one, but it has depth and complexity and is a pretty good drink for the near-term. 2019-2022. **87.**

2016 Meursault “Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Roche de Bellene

I assume that the Meursault old vine bottling hails from several different *lieux à dits* in the village, as it is from a combined acreage of 2.25 hectares and the vines range from forty-eight to sixty-two years of age. The wine saw twenty percent new oak during its *élevage* and the 2016 offers up a nicely complex bouquet of apple, pear, hazelnuts, chalky soil tones, a touch of citrus peel and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and complex, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, bright acids and a long, succulent and very well-balanced

finish. I like this even a hair better than the Charmes! This is wide open today and drinking with plenty of style. 2019-2035. **90+**.

2016 Meursault “Charmes”- Maison Roche de Bellene

The vineyard of Charmes in Meursault was spared from significant frost damage in 2016 and this is quite evident in the 2016 Meursault “Charmes” from Maison Roche de Bellene, as the wine has far more energy and bounce than the 2016 Saint-Aubin. The bouquet is still quite youthful and a bit blocked by SO₃, so it needs some coaxing to blossom, but eventually offers up a fine blend of apple, hazelnuts, a touch of tangerine, chalky soil tones and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with good acids, fine soil signature and a long, focused and zesty finish. The fairly generous level of sulfur needs to be decanted out of the wine if drinking it young, but it does well with aeration and is a good example of this fine premier cru. It should age well, and though it is not the most elegant rendition of Charmes, it is a very good bottle. 2019-2035. **90**.

2016 Puligny-Montrachet “Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Roche de Bellene

The 2016 old vine bottling of Puligny AC from Maison Roche de Bellene hails from one hectare of vines, and I guess that these are spread over at least a couple of different *lieux à dits*. The age of vines here ranges from forty-eight to sixty years of age and the wine saw twenty percent new wood during the *elevage*. Like the Chassagne V.V. below, the yields here were quite correct at forty-five hectoliters per hectare, indicating no serious frost damage. The bouquet is lovely and has a nice touch of reserve to it that sets it apart from the more wide open Meursault and Chassagne versions in this vintage, offering up scents of grapefruit, white peach, a touch of iodine, chalky soil tones, orange blossoms, a touch of citrus peel and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and shows off good depth at the core, with bright acids and good focus and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is a bit bound up in its structural elements today and needs a year or two to properly blossom. It should be quite good when it is ready to go and will outlive its counterparts in the lineup from Meursault and Chassagne, but I am not sure it will ever quite have the same elegance of those two wines. 2021-2040. **89+**.

2016 Puligny-Montrachet “Champ Gain”- Maison Roche de Bellene

The 2016 Champ Gain from Monsieur Potel hails from a parcel that was probably at least partially frosted, as the yields here in 2016 were thirty hectoliters per hectare. The wine went into bottle quite reductively and there is a fair bit of iodine in the aromatic blend of apple, white peach, good limestone minerality, citrus blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthful, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent acids and grip, fine focus and a long, promising and energetic finish. This also has a fair bit of SO₂ in evidence still at this early age and is clearly built to age gracefully. It will need some time in the cellar to uncoil, but it will be very good in the fullness of time. 2023-2045. **92**.

2016 Puligny-Montrachet “les Folatières”- Maison Roche de Bellene

The 2016 Maison Roche de Bellene Folatières is produced from a thirty *ares* parcel of forty-five year-old vines and was raised in thirty percent new oak. The wine was bottled just a touch reductively, which augurs well for its conservation in bottle, but with a little coaxing, offers up a classy nose of nectarine, apple, chalky soil tones, almond, gently musky spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly youthful, with a good core, bright acids and quite good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Folatières can occasionally lean a bit towards a chunkier style of Puligny and this bottling from Maison Roche de Bellene is from that school, but it has plenty of depth and length to recommend itself at the same time. This is a good, solid example. 2019-2040+. **91**.

2016 Chassagne-Montrachet “Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Roche de Bellene

The Vieilles Vignes bottling from Chassagne from Nicolas Potel is from vines in excess of fifty years of age and this parcel was not heavily hit by the frost (a rare occurrence in Chassagne in 2016), as it hails from a reasonable crop level of forty-eight hectoliters per hectare. In my experience, many of the best 2016 white Burgundies hail from vineyards that were not heavily frosted and had normal yields. Again, this saw twenty percent new wood, as is the case with the other old vine *villages* bottlings in the range from Maison Roche de Bellene. The nose wafts from the glass in a refined blend of lemon, pineapple, complex, chalky soil tones, citrus flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, fine transparency and grip, sound framing acids and lovely bounce on the long and complex finish. This has lovely personality, and though it is just a touch on the soft side and will not make old bones, it is beautifully balanced and will offer plenty of enjoyment over the coming decade or so.. 2019-2030+. **90.**



Domaine Bellene and Maison Roche de Bellene Vins Rouges

2016 Bellenos Cuvée Rouge

This is the entry level bottling from Nicolas Potel, which is comprised of a blend of gamay from Beaujolais and pinot noir from somewhere in the Côte d’Or. The 2016 Bellenos offers up a lovely nose of cranberry, cherry, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke and a good foundation of soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and very well-balanced, with a good core of

fruit, very modest tannins and a long, bouncy and quite impressive finish. This is very nicely crafted! 2019-2025+. **88.**

2016 Bourgogne Pinot Noir “Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Roche de Bellene

The 2016 Bourgogne Rouge “Vieilles Vignes” from Maison Roche de Bellene is composed of fruit sourced from villages in the Côte Chalonnaise, Côte de Beaune and in the hills of the Côte de Nuits Villages appellation. The vines range from thirty to eighty years of age and the wine saw no new casks during its *elevage*. The wine is a very good example on the nose, offering up a nicely soil-driven and red fruity bouquet of strawberries, cherries, chalky soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones and a touch of gamebird. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and shows off good depth at the core, a bit of tannin and a long, still fairly closed finish. Like many Bourgogne rouge bottlings, this could do with a bit of time in the cellar to spread its wings. 2021-2040+. **87+.**

2016 Gevrey-Chambertin “Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Roche de Bellene

Nicolas Potel’s 2016 Gevrey-Chambertin “Vieilles Vignes” is produced from vines that range from forty-two to seventy-two years of age. The wine is raised in twenty percent new oak, and as the *villages* level vineyards of Gevrey were spared any serious frost damage in 2016, the wine has turned out quite well. The bouquet offers up a youthful aromatic blend of red and black cherries, a touch of spiced meats, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, mustard seed and a dollop of new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, nascently complex and well-balanced, with good depth at the core, chewy tannins, fine focus and good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This needs a few years’ worth of bottle age to start to drink with generosity, but it is well-made and is going to be quite tasty when it is ready to go. 2024-2055+. **89+.**

2016 Chambolle-Musigny “Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Roche de Bellene

The old vine bottling of Chambolle *villages* from Nicolas Potel and his winemaker, Sylvain Debord, was crafted from an eighteen *ares* parcel of vines, which range from fifty to seventy years of age. As the yields here are listed at forty-eight hectoliters per hectare, I assume their parcel was able to escape heavy frost damage in 2016. The bouquet offers up a classic blend of red and black cherries, red plums, coffee, woodsmoke, gamebird, a lovely base of soil tones, just a wisp of new oak and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, elegant and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent transparency, fine-grained tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. Give this a bit of time in the cellar to stretch its wings- it is going to be a fine, fine example. 2024-2055+. **91.**

2016 Vosne-Romanée “Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Roche de Bellene

The 2016 Vosne-Romanée “Vieilles Vignes” from Maison Roche de Bellene hails from a bigger parcel of vines than the Chambolle V.V., as this is nearly a half hectare in size. The vine age is about the same, with these vines between fifty and sixty years of age, but it was cropped at a lower level of twenty-eight hectoliters per hectare, indicating that there was some frosting here in the spring. Keep in mind that this is the *négociant* bottling of Vosne “Vieilles Vignes”, and not the one from Monsieur Potel’s 1927-planted vines that is bottled under his Domaine Bellene label. It was raised in forty percent new casks this year, but I am not sure if this is just because the prevailing trend in Vosne at many domaines is to over-oak the wines, or because Monsieur Potel had already contracted for the new casks before the frosts cut back the yields. In any case, the wine is quite good on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a black fruity blend of black raspberries, a touch of cassis, dark chocolate, gamebird, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and a generous serving of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a good core, fine mineral drive, ripe tannins and a long,

promising and well-balanced finish. This carries its new oak very well and the wine will be quite tasty when it has a chance to blossom with a bit of bottle age. Good juice. 2023-2055+. **90.**

2016 Vosne-Romanée “les Suchots”- Domaine de Bellene

Of the 2016 bottlings I tasted from Nicolas Potel, the Suchots is from his smallest parcel, as he owns just over 21 *ares* in this fine premier cru. These are also the oldest vines in his portfolio (or at least of the wines that I have seen), as they were planted all the way back in 1937! Like his other premier crus in 2016, the Suchots is raised in fifty percent new wood in this vintage. The wine is still young and showing its new oak a bit more than the Boudots, for example, but there is plenty of stuffing here and the wood should integrate nicely with a bit more bottle age. The bouquet delivers a complex blend of black raspberries, dark berries, gamebird, Vosne spice tones, fresh thyme, dark soil tones, bonfire and a fair bit of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly powerful in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine mineral drive, very good focus and grip, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is a very good, young wine, but it does not show quite the same potential for elegance down the road as the stunning Nuits “Boudots”, which I have a slight preference for out of the blocks. But, that said, this wine has excellent depth and serious backend energy and it may well just need a bit more time in the cellar to catch up with the outstanding Boudots. 2030-2075. **92.**

2016 Nuits St. Georges “Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Roche de Bellene

This is the *négociant* bottling of old vine Nuits St. Georges from Nicolas Potel. It hails from a parcel that is just over 1.5 hectares in surface area, with the vines ranging forty-eight to fifty-four years of age. Like the other old vine *villages* bottlings, Monsieur Potel decided to give this twenty percent new oak in 2016. The wine offers up a youthfully promising bouquet of red and black cherries, hung game, espresso, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, chicory and a bit of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very nicely balanced, with good depth at the core, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and classy finish. This will not be one of those broad-shouldered, overly sturdy examples of Nuits, but rather a wine that captures the style of the commune beautifully, but does not take forever to come around. Good juice. 2025-2055. **89.**

2016 Nuits St. Georges “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de Bellene

The domaine-bottled version of Nuits St. Georges old vines hails from a parcel of sixty-seven year-old vines that Monsieur Potel purchased and which comprised just under two and a half hectares. It was raised in a touch more new oak than the *négociant* version, having seen thirty percent of its casks new in 2016. The wine is both more red fruity and more reserved on the nose than the Maison version, offering up a deep and complex nose of cherries, pomegranate, espresso, venison, a touch of saddle leather, complex soil tones, nutskin, a well done framing of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and more structured and serious than the *négociant* bottling, with an outstanding core of fruit, great soil signature, firm, buried tannins and a long, tangy and impressively complex finish. This will need a few more years in the cellar than the Maison version, but it has even finer potential and is a top notch example of Nuits St. Georges in the making and is premier cru quality without a doubt! 2027-2065+. **91+.**

2016 Nuits St. Georges “les Boudots”- Maison Roche de Bellene

Nicolas Potel contracts for a nice parcel of old vines in les Boudots, as he gets the production from a third of a hectare plot of seventy year-old vines in this excellent premier cru. The wine is raised in fifty percent new wood in 2016 and delivers a refined aromatic

constellation of red and black cherries, plums, gamebird, complex soil tones, a touch of Vosne spice elements, a dollop of fresh thyme and cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with great focus and grip, a very refined, classic Boudots personality, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. Boudots at its best is probably Nuits' most elegant premier cru and this version from Monsieur Potel perfectly captures that aspect of this superb *terroir*. This is an absolute classic example. 2028-2075. **93+**.



2016 Savigny-lès-Beaune “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de Bellene

The 2016 Savigny-lès-Beaune “Vieilles Vignes” bottling from Domaine de Bellene is produced from sixty-five year-old vines, and Monsieur Potel owns just over a hectare here. This wine sees thirty percent new wood during its *elevage*. The village of Savigny was one of the most heavily-frosted in the Côte de Beaune in 2016, but there is no information here on how short the yields were for this bottling. The bouquet is deep and nicely spicy out of the blocks, offering up scents of red currants, cherries, smoked meats, plenty of spice tones, stony soil elements and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and properly structured out of the blocks, with an excellent core and soil signature, ripe, firm tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This will need some time in the cellar to blossom, but it will be very good once it is ready to go. 2024-2060+. **90**.

2016 Volnay “Vieilles Vignes”- Maison Roche de Bellene

The 2016 Volnay “Vieilles Vignes” from Maison Roche de Bellene hails from a 1.5 hectare parcel of vines that range from forty-eight to sixty-two years of age. As readers will recall, the village was one of the hardest hit by frosts in this vintage and the yields in this parcel were only thirty hectoliters per hectare. Monsieur Potel raised this bottling in twenty percent new oak. It offers up a deep and youthful nose of cassis, black cherries, woodsmoke, hung game, dark soil tones and a bit of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and still quite primary at the present time, with a good core of fruit, fairly firm tannins and good length and grip on the soil-driven and promising finish. Like many of the 2016 Volnay bottlings, this has some muscle this year and will need some time in the cellar to blossom, but it should end up being a good example. 2024-2055. **89.**

2016 Volnay “les Mitans”- Maison Roche de Bellene

The parcel of Mitans that Nicolas Potel contracts for also was hit by frost in 2016 (unlike neighboring Pommard, where most of the frost damage was limited to the *villages* level parcels, there was also significant freezing in some of Volnay’s premier crus) and the yield here were only twenty-eight hectoliters per hectare as a result. This parcel, which is just under a half hectare, are just over forty years of age, and perhaps as a result of the short crop here, the wine was raised in fifty percent new oak in this vintage. It delivers a beautifully expressive bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, espresso, complex, dark soil tones, a nice touch of grilled meat and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully soil-reflective, with a lovely core of black fruit, fine-grained tannins and excellent focus and grip on the nascently complex and very promising finish. This is a first class example of Mitans. 2026-2065. **92.**

2016 Volnay “Clos des Chênes”- Maison Roche de Bellene

These are fifty year-old vines in Clos des Chênes that Monsieur Potel purchased the fruit from, with the parcel comprising thirty-two *ares*. This too was cropped at twenty-eight hectoliters per hectare and raised in fifty percent new oak in 2016. The wine is a bit more closed than the Mitans out of the blocks, but possesses the same lovely, black fruit tones and meaty overtones, with the bouquet delivering scents of cassis, black plums, smoked meats, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of black tea, gentle spices, dark chocolate and a well-integrated base of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, soil-driven and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent focus and grip, ripe tannins and a long, promising and classy finish. This is even more refined in personality than the very good Mitans and is going to be a lovely example of Clos des Chênes with sufficient bottle age. 2026-2065+. **93.**