

# VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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**THE 2012 GERMAN VINTAGE:  
A THROWBACK VINTAGE OF BEAUTIFUL RIPENESS,  
ZESTY ACIDITY AND VIRTUALLY NO BOTRYTIS**



*Riesling grapes in Niersteiner Pettenthal in mid-October destined for the 2012 Keller Kabinett.*

The 2012 vintage in Germany has turned out splendidly, though it has arrived at its excellent synthesis of very pure ripeness and snappy acidity in a rather circuitous manner that caught many winegrowers here by surprise and was beyond the expectations of all but the most optimistic producers in the soggy days of May and June. The spring got off to a slightly slower than hoped for start, due to the very cold winter that lingered in the steep hillsides and pitched valleys of German wine country- or at least in the regions I visited on this trip: the Mosel, Nahe and Rheinhessen. The critical flowering period in early June was interrupted by inclement weather, with the sun only showing itself in fitful intervals between showers and overcast skies. The result was an uneven, drawn out and inconsistent flowering, which would adversely affect yields in the vineyards in 2012, but this difficulty varied from estate to estate, so not everyone's quantities in 2012 were as greatly reduced as their neighbors' might be in this vintage. For example, according to Dr. Carl von Schubert, the average yields at Maximin Grünhäuser in 2012 were around thirty-five hectoliter per hectare (or about ten hectoliters per hectare lower than in 2011) and nearby at Karthäuserhof, they came in at thirty hectoliters per hectare, which was even a touch lower than the very small harvest of 2010 at this estate. The low yields were not only the result of the difficult flowering, but also the very small berries that most vines produced in this vintage. As Christophe Schaefer of Weingut Willi Schaefer in Graach commented, "when one

walked through the vineyards prior to harvest, the bunches of grapes per vine looked quite normal, but when one collected all the bunches in a parcel and looked at the bins, the smaller-sized bunches really showed that quantity was going to be down in 2012.” Additionally, the smaller berries on each bunch, of course, possessed less juice, and much of the superb quality of the vintage can be attributed to these low yields in 2012, though this was not evident in the early days when the producers were crushing their bunches and seeing so little juice in return.

The inclement weather during flowering was followed up by more rain throughout the month of June and early July, with Christian Vogt of Karthäuserhof commenting that the rainy period of the early summer culminated in the Ruwer with “a ferocious storm on July 5<sup>th</sup>, which dropped very, very heavy rain over a two hour period and caused flooding in the winery’s cellars for the very first time in our long history.” Happily, this was the last of the serious rain for the summer and the weather turned warm and sunny throughout the remainder of July, and the uneven weather of August still had plenty of sunny days. However, as September dawned, the grapes were still behind schedule in ripening and no one really had any idea if this vintage would turn out well. But, September turned out to be glorious, with plenty of sun, warm temperatures and relatively cool nights, which got the ripening of the grapes moving forward at a brisk pace, while still keeping the acidity levels nice and high. This was followed by a beautiful October, with the sun remaining and the nights still cool and crisp, setting the stage for a late harvest of excellent quality. As Christophe Schaefer noted, “the season was really made by the beautiful weather of October, with very healthy and small berries ripening perfectly in the sunny days and cool nights.” Most estates picked quite late in 2012, with typical harvest dates starting in mid-October and finishing up the first week of November, though there were some exceptions to this timeline (both earlier and later) at the estates I visited in mid-March, and it seemed to me that, generally the later one harvested in 2012, the finer the quality in this vintage.

One of the interesting and rather unique characteristics of the 2012 vintage is the very small (or nearly non-existent) role that botrytis played in this year, as there was very little botrytis to be found amongst the three regions that I visited, and the little that did arrive came in October and did not really spread, due to the cool, sunny and dry conditions of October and early November. This is not to say that there are not some absolutely magical examples of Auslese and higher Prädikat wines in 2012, as the very small and perfectly ripe berries delivered truly stunning raw materials for many superb sweet wines, but the vast majority of these are Auslesen that are defined by concentrated fruit of perfectly ripe, healthy grapes, often concentrated by slight dehydration from the winds or late October frost, rather than by noble rot. There are a smattering of wines that have a nice glaze of botrytis to go along with their beautifully ripe and pure fruit, with estates often collecting a bit of shriveled bunches early on in the harvesting season to make a Goldkapsel Auslese, and then settling in and picking the rest of their vineyards at lovely levels of ripeness, but without any further noble rot. This not to say that sugar levels are low in this vintage, as the grapes were in a beautiful stage of ripeness when they were picked, with these “golden berries” offering up very good Oechsle levels, with the concentrating effect of the wind and sunny October days sufficing to raise sugars to optimal levels without the aid of any botrytis. As some of my very favorite Auslesen for current drinking from vintages like 1988 also are the products of little or no botrytis and perfectly ripe grapes, I am very excited about the prospects for wines of this type in the 2012 vintage.

The 2012 vintage is another absolutely exceptional year for dry Rieslings- which will please the domestic German market to no end- and I tasted some truly scintillating examples of dry wines during my week on the road in Germany. Only time will tell where they stand in comparison to the superb, dry 2011ers, but if they do not quite equal the quality of the previous year's dry wines, then they are going to come very, very close and it will be fascinating to follow the best examples of the two vintages' dry wines over the coming couple of decades. The vintage has also produced some truly beautiful wines at the Kabinett and, especially, the Spätlese level, with these beautifully dancing and delicately sweet wines probably the heart and the soul of the vintage in 2012. I have already mentioned how fine the potential is for the non-botrytized Auslesen are this year, and the small percentage of noble sweet wines made with botrytis are also superb, with the gentle concentrating effect of the very clean noble rot adding intensity, gentle tropical fruit shadings and increasing acids that were already very ripe and present. This is not a vintage for heavily glazed wines made from shriveled berries, so there was little Beerenauslese and no Trockenbeerenauslese at the estates I visited on this trip, but there was some Eiswein made in 2012, from frosts around October 25<sup>th</sup> and then again on the cold nights between December 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> (depending on the region). The handful of examples of Eiswein I tasted in this vintage are going to be truly stunning, as the frosts froze berries that were already beautifully ripe, so that there are great acids and purity in the examples that I was fortunate enough to sample.

Of the notes that follow, I have arranged the wines by region, with the Rheinhessen, followed by the Nahe, Middle Mosel, Ruwer and Saar. Within each regional grouping, the estates are listed alphabetically. With all of the wines, I have given windows of drinkability that assume the wines will age properly under the chosen closure, even though the number of basic bottlings now sealed under screwcaps continues to grow. Most of the pressure for the lower level wines under the screw comes from the estates' importers and other clients, who like the convenience of screwcaps and push the producers pretty strenuously to at least have the more basic wines bottled under screwcaps. Almost all of the growers I spoke with are firmly of the opinion that the wines do not age as gracefully under the screw, but this is not Burgundy, where the whole world is lined up ten deep at the cellar door to buy the wines and the producers in Germany for the most part have to bow to the wishes of their importers on this issue. The sole exception to this is Klaus-Peter Keller, who absolutely refuses to bottle any of his wines under screwcap and is adamantly opposed to the closure. Even a producer of the stature of Egon Müller is quite in favor of the closure and has said that he would switch his entire range of wines to the screw if his clients would accept them, but at least for the moment, we are fortunate enough that his upscale clientele would not buy the wines if they were not sealed under natural cork. Of course, the statistical studies would indicate that the majority of wines sealed up under screwcap will succumb to some degree of permanent reduction by their third birthdays, so please take this into account when looking at the proposed windows of drinkability for any wine sealed under screwcap and understand that the casualty rate is going to be quite high once the wine has spent a few years in bottle under the screw. One would like to think that some of these estates' importers might take a more responsible tact and insist on even the lower level wines being sealed under natural cork or Diam- which is a cost-effective alternative to the screwcap that has a much higher rate of a wine's proper evolution in bottle- but, until customers start returning bottles of permanently reduced wines to importers, this is simply not going to happen.

## **Rheinhessen**

### **Weingut Keller (Flörsheim-Dalsheim)**

*Klaus-Peter and Julia Keller have once again fashioned absolutely reference point wines in the 2012 vintage and it is hard to imagine anyone in Germany having realized more success in this vintage than Weingut Keller. 2012 was the latest harvest here at the estate since 2004, with the last grapes of the vintage brought into the winery by mid-November. As Klaus-Peter Keller commented, "the 2012 vintage had the finest potential of the last ten to twelve vintages- with perfectly ripe, golden berries from a cool and racy year with brilliant acidity- but you had to be patient and not pick too early." For those who waited for the optimal moment, in Klaus-Peter's opinion, "2012 is a great, great year for Grosses Gewächs, Kabinett and Spätlese." The yields here were down another ten to fifteen percent from the already low yields of 2011, so there will not be as much Keller wine for an increasingly thirsty world from the 2012 vintage, so make sure to make your reservations early for these 2012ers, which are clearly among the most brilliant wines Klaus-Peter Keller has yet fashioned during his career. I thought the bar had been set at a very, very high level in the last couple of years here at Weingut Keller and it would not be possible to produce even better wines than the stunning lineup here in 2010 and 2011, but the 2012ers look- at this early stage- to be even finer and more precise than those great wines and are likely to be the greatest wines yet fashioned by Klaus-Peter Keller!*

*As Klaus-Peter noted, by harvesting late in 2012, once was able to take advantage of the "ice cold nights" at the end of the growing season, which were responsible "for very cold fingers picking each morning, but also for very precise and focused wines." The 2012 vintage at Weingut Keller will also be one of historical note, as their 2012 Grosses Gewächs from the Hipping vineyard in Nierstein will be served at Queen Elizabeth's Sixtieth anniversary celebration of her ascending to the throne later this year. This is particularly appropriate, as the Kellers now own precisely the same parcel from which the 1952 Niersteiner Hipping wine from Weingut F.K. Schmitt was produced and which was poured at the dinner to celebrate her original coronation in 1953, so sixty years later the wine has come full circle for the queen and she will be serving a young, but utterly brilliant wine to her guests at the festivities. Beyond producing the wine for the Queen's celebration, 2012 is also the first vintage for a new Pinot Noir bottling from Weingut Keller, as the family has budded over a new parcel of the Morstein vineyard to Pinot Noir, with the selection massale Pinot cuttings grafted onto sixty-five year-old Sylvaner vines. This is a stunning new addition to what is already the finest range of Pinot Noir bottlings in Germany and the 2012 will be a stellar first vintage of the Kellers' new Morstein Spätburgunder. As has been the case for the last several years, Weingut Keller has produced absolutely stunning wines up and down their range, and one should take every opportunity one finds to secure bottles of the 2012ers here, as these are destined to be absolutely magical wines that will be spoken of with reverence a generation down the line. As fans of the Keller estate are already well aware, it is not necessary to just chase the most famous bottlings of Grosses Gewächs or G-Max to discover the magic of Klaus-Peter's wines, as the same care is taken with the lower level bottlings as are taken with the most famous cuvées, and there is stunning potential for longevity and complexity to be found in each and every 2012er here this year, and I would not be unhappy if my cellar was only able to be stocked up with wines such as the 2012 von der Fels Riesling Trocken or the Feuervogel Silvaner Trocken or the Niersteiner Hipping Kabinett! The entire range of 2012ers from Weingut Keller are stunning and will be great additions to any well-stocked cellar- with the noble sweet wines every bit as magical in 2012.*



## ***Pinot Noir***

### **2011 Bürgel Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

The 2011 Bürgel Spätburgunder was made with thirty percent whole clusters this year and is an absolutely superb wine in the making, offering up a deep and very classy bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of meatiness, cocoa, lovely soil tones and a gentle framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure, complex and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, impressive focus and balance, nascent complexity and a long, elegant and gently tannic finish. Klaus-Peter Keller has already set the bar for Spätburgunder very high with his previous vintages, but it seems to me that these wines are getting more refined with every passing vintage. Lovely juice. 2018-2035+. **92+**.

### **2011 Frauenberg Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs (Selection Massale)- Weingut Keller**

The 2011 Frauenberg Spätburgunder, like the Bürgel, came in around 12.7 percent alcohol this year, and as these younger vines are now starting to get some good age under them, the wine is getting more and more complex with each passing vintage. The 2011 Frauenberg offers up a very refined aromatic constellation of black cherries, woodsmoke, dark chocolate, a beautifully complex base of soil, a touch of cherry skin, gamebirds and a gentle base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and velvety on the attack, with a lovely core, suave tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. Just a beautiful middleweight in the making! 2020-2040+. **94**.



*The first Weingut Keller vintage (2012) of Morstein Pinot Noir grapes.*

### **2012 Morstein Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs (Selection Massale)- Weingut Keller**

It is obviously still very early days to be tasting the 2012 Morstein Spätburgunder, but it is already quite clear at this very early stage that this is going to be a great new addition to the lineup of Pinot Noir bottlings at Weingut Keller. The 2012 was produced from tiny and beautifully ripe berries (see the photo below), and forty percent of the whole clusters were retained. The remaining sixty percent of the bunches were destemmed by hand by Julia and Klaus-Peter Keller, and the first vintage produced enough for only a single barrel of this lovely wine. The bouquet is deep and nascently complex, offering up scents of black cherries, woodsmoke, raw cocoa, a complex base of chalky soil tones, fresh herbs and just a touch of cedar from its “one wine” barrel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and youthful, with a potentially quite velvety palate impression, a lovely core of fruit, fine-grained tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. This will be a lovely bottle of wine and I cannot wait to taste it next year, once it has had a year of *elevage* and has really taken shape! 2022-2045. **93-95+?**

### ***Scheurebe***

*I only tasted this single bottling of Scheurebe Trocken from the Morstein vineyard from Weingut Keller this year. I am not sure if there are other Scheurebe bottlings in the cellars from 2012, but this wine was certainly stunning!*

### **2012 Scheurebe Trocken- Weingut Keller**

The Scheurebe Trocken comes from a parcel of vines right adjacent to the new Pinot Noir parcel in Morstein. This is a beautiful and very classy wine that so eloquently demonstrates that one does not have to chase the fanciest bottlings at Weingut Keller to drink extremely well in 2012! The beautiful nose offers up a mix of cassis, grapefruit, orange peel, a touch of petrol, chalky minerality and a topnote of corn flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very elegant, with lovely “cool” fruit tones, ripe acids and excellent cut and grip on the complex and bouncy finish. A very high class bottle of dry Scheurebe! 2013-2030. **92+.**

### ***Dry White Wines***

#### **2012 Grüner Sylvaner Trocken- Weingut Keller**

The 2012 Grüner Sylvaner Trocken from Weingut Keller is excellent this year, coming in around twelve percent alcohol and offering up all of the elegance and cut of the vintage. Klaus-Peter and Julia Keller noted that this is always their very first wine to sell out each year, as it is considered the perfect match with white asparagus and their long-time clients clamor to get this wine as early as possible to match the white asparagus season in the spring. The 2012 is a beautifully expressive wine on the nose, offering up scents of tart orange, a touch of papaya, lovely minerality, a gentle note of petrol and a topnote of citrus oil. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and precise, with lovely focus and grip, a very good core, ripe acids and a long, classy finish. This is high class juice and a great value! 2013-2025. **90.**

#### **2012 Silvaner Trocken “Feuervogel” Alte Reben- Weingut Keller**

The 2012 Feuervogel old vine version of Sylvaner is quite a bit more reserved out of the blocks than the basic bottling, but it too shares the great elegance and cut of the 2012ers at Weingut Keller. The closed nose reluctantly offers up scents of grapefruit, orange zest, petrol, wet stones, lemongrass, a touch of sea salts and citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a great core of fruit, more obvious refinement than the regular Silvaner bottling, with laser-like focus, again, beautifully ripe acidity and superb focus

and grip on the very long and youthful finish. I would tuck this away for at least a couple of years to allow it to really blossom. 2015-2030+. **92.**

**2012 Riesling Trocken- Weingut Keller**

The 2012 Keller Riesling Trocken is a superb follow-up to the lovely 2011er, with perhaps even a touch greater precision and complexity. The deep and very classy nose offers up scents of tart orange, pink grapefruit, petrol, a complex base of limestone minerality and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and dancing, with a great core, excellent focus and grip and a very long, complex finish. This is just a stunning value! 2014-2030+. **90.**

**2012 Riesling “von der Fels” Trocken- Weingut Keller**

The 2012 von der Fels bottling has been boosted with two barrels of Abtserde and one barrel of Morstein Riesling from a parcel of thirty year-old vines, and this is clearly the finest vintage I have yet tasted of this superb cuvée. The brilliant nose soars from the glass in a blaze of tangerine, sweet grapefruit, a nice touch of wild yeasts, kaleidoscopic minerality, lemongrass, incipient notes of petrol and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and youthfully complex, with Grosses Gewächs depth in the mid-palate this year, great focus and grip and a very, very long, still quite young and racy finish. This is an absolutely stunning wine in 2012 and clearly shows that the fireworks at Weingut Keller start way below the level of the GG's this year! 2017-2040. **93+.**

**2012 Hipping Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

The one barrel of Hipping Grosses Gewächs this year is a stunning wine of brilliant elegance on both the nose and palate, and Queen Elizabeth could not ask for a more magical bottle to mark her sixtieth anniversary on the throne. The magical nose wafts from the glass in a blend of lemon, tangerine, pink grapefruit, pulverized stone, a gentle touch of wild yeasts, incipient notes of petrol, orange peel and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very refined, with laser-like focus, great complexity and mid-palate depth, ripe, racy acids and stunning balance on the very long and racy finish. Just a brilliant wine in the making. If I were the queen, I might make sure to keep a couple of cases of this wine around for her seventieth anniversary as well! 2020-2050. **94+.**

**2012 Pettenthal Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

Nierstein's greatest vineyard, the Pettenthal, has performed equally brilliantly in 2012 and this is a great, great wine in the making. The nose is more reserved than in the Hipping GG, offering up a very promising constellation of tart orange, grapefruit, petrol, complex slate tones, smoke, citrus peel and corn flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with crisp, ripe acids, stunning nascent complexity and great focus and grip on the very, very long and flawlessly balanced finish. What a stunning, stunning wine! 2025-2060+. **95+.**

**2012 Kirchspiel Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

Klaus-Peter Keller's old vines in the Kirchspiel will celebrate their fiftieth birthdays in 2014, so this parcel is really at the top of its game at the present time and this brilliant 2012er may well be the greatest example I have yet tasted from Klaus-Peter. The flawlessly ripe and pure nose soars from the glass in a blend of pink grapefruit, orange, a gentle base of wild yeasts, stunning complex minerality, a touch of petrol, citrus zest and lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and seamless, with a superb core of fruit, dazzling complexity, ripe acids and stunning focus and grip on the very, very long and pinpoint finish. Just a brilliant bottle of dry Riesling! 2020-2060. **95+.**



### **2012 Hubacker Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

As is always the case, the 2012 Hubacker Grosses Gewächs, with its predominantly red soils, is quite different in profile from the chalky Kirchspiel or Morstein, but in its own way it is every bit as magical as those two wines in this great Keller vintage. The glorious bouquet is a mix of blood orange, grapefruit, orange peel, incipient notes of petrol, beautifully complex soil tones, a touch of fresh rosemary and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with ripe, zesty acidity, great focus and balance and a very, very long, supremely elegant finish. In some vintages the Hubacker can be the most broad-shouldered of the Keller GG lineup and perhaps not quite as filigreed as a result, but this is emphatically not the case in the 2012 vintage, where the wine is brilliantly refined and complete. Great, great juice! 2020-2060. **94+**.

### **2012 Morstein Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

As I noted last year, there is a little bit more Morstein in the Keller cellars these days, as Klaus-Peter purchased an additional parcel of Morstein planted with sixty year-old vines to augment his previous holdings, as well as the section that was budded over to Pinot Noir. The 2012 Morstein is destined to go down as one of the greatest wines yet produced from this great vineyard by Klaus-Peter Keller (and keep in mind that the first several vintages of G-Max hailed from the estate's Morstein parcel), as the wine is brilliant on both the nose and the palate. The stunning bouquet is a blend of sweet grapefruit, tart orange, wild yeasts, orange zest, gentle notes of petrol, floral tones and a beautiful synthesis of citrus zest and limestone minerality serving to really ratchet up the precision of the aromatics. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and displays superb mid-palate depth, with perfectly ripe acidity, laser-like focus, flawless balance and a very, very long and primary finish. This is a monumental vintage for the Keller Morstein GG, and yet, it is not even the greatest wine from this vineyard in 2012! 2022-2065. **96**.

### **2012 Abtserde Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Keller**

There is a crystalline quality to the 2012 Keller Abtserde that makes the wine almost gem-like in its precision and sparkling complexity this year. The magical bouquet soars from the glass in a blaze of orange zest, pink grapefruit, petrol, crystalline, chalky minerality, citrus peel, esthery notes of bee pollen and lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and brilliantly detailed, with a fine core, crisp, seamless acids, stunning focus and balance and a beautifully complex and flawless finish of glorious length and grip. This is clearly one of the finest examples of dry Riesling I have ever had the pleasure to taste, and I have drunk more than my fair share of Clos Ste. Hune over the years! 2020-2060. **97+**.

### **2012 G-Max Riesling- Weingut Keller**

During the course of his career, it is my distinct impression that Klaus-Peter Keller has never made a greater wine than the 2012 G-Max and I am absolutely in love with the flawless blending of intensity of flavor and unbridled elegance in this magically complex wine. The nose and palate are both deeper and more reserved out of the blocks than the Abtserde, but offer up a stunning blend of blood orange, grapefruit, a touch of white cherry, kaleidoscopic minerality, wild yeasts, citrus oils, petrol and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and seamless, with great depth at the core, haunting elegance and focus, ripe acids and stunning length and grip on the nascently complex and endless finish. This is as good as any young white wine I have ever had the pleasure to taste! 2020-2060+. **100**.

### ***Slightly Off-Dry Wines***

*In the last several vintages, Klaus-Peter Keller has been content to allow certain cuvées that do not ferment out to sufficient dryness to be labeled as Trocken bottlings (which must be ten grams per liter of residual sugar or less) to simply be bottled at the level where they stopped their fermentations naturally, so these are essentially still dry wines that are just above the legal threshold to be labeled as Trocken. In 2012, two of the three barrels of the Hipping vineyard's production that was picked to go into the GG from this vineyard actually stopped fermentation just over the Trocken threshold, so there is a bit of Hipping "R" this year.*

### **2012 Riesling "RR"- Weingut Keller**

The 2012 "RR" bottling from Weingut Keller is again just a touch sweeter than the legal limit for a Trocken bottling, as the wine stopped fermenting with 12-13 grams per liter of residual sugar and Klaus-Peter really liked the balance of the wine with this slight touch of more sweetness to buffer the acidity in the wine. This is really a terrific bottling, offering up a fine blend of tangerine, blood orange, a beautiful base of soil, gentle notes of petrol, a touch of fresh rosemary and citrus oils. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and seamless, with perfectly ripe fruit, crisp acids, beautiful transparency and simply stunning length and grip. Though this is legally just above Trocken, it is essentially still a quite dry wine and it is another stellar value in the Keller lineup of 2012ers. 2014-2035. **92+.**

### **2012 Hipping "R"- Weingut Keller**

Two out of the three barrels of the Hipping destined for the Grosses Gewächs bottling did not ferment out to sufficient dryness to qualify for official Trocken status, so there is actually a bit more of the Hipping "R" than there is of the GG in 2012. This is a brilliant wine that offers up a youthfully compelling bouquet of pink grapefruit, fresh pineapple, a beautifully complex base of slate, citrus zest, a touch of smokiness and a gentle topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and tangy, with a great core of fruit, filigreed complexity and a very long, snappy and dancing finish. There is just a whisper of residual sugar here and this is essentially also a dry wine in 2012, but not quite under the legal limit. Great juice. 2019-2045+. **94.**

### ***Noble Sweet Wines***

### **2012 Niersteiner Hipping Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Keller**

With each passing vintage, the delicacy of the lower Prädikat wines from Weingut Keller becomes more evident, and these two Niersteiner Kabinetten from 2012 are absolutely stunning and classic in their filigree and ethereal natures. The Hipping Kabinett offers up a beautifully filigreed nose of white peach, tangerine, slate, white flowers and just a whisper of petrol. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and delicate, with a nice core, beautiful complexity, bright acids and a long, pure and classically dancing Kabinett finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Kabinett that utterly captures the ethereal nature of this Prädikat. 2015-2035+. **92.**

### **2012 Niersteiner Pettenthal Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Keller**

As beautiful as the 2012 Hipping Kabinett is this year, the glorious golden berries of the Pettenthal have produced an even more magical Kabinett. As Klaus-Peter Keller commented of the grapes harvested in the Pettenthal for this Kabinett, "better grapes are simply not possible for Kabinett than what we had in the Pettenthal this year." The stunning nose soars from the glass in a transparent mélange of apple, peach, tangerine, a beautifully complex base of slate, a touch of orange zest and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure,

transparent and filigreed, with dancing acids, a lovely core, and a very, very long and utterly ethereal finish. A brilliant Kabinett of delicacy and lightness of step. 2016-2040. **96.**

**2012 Niersteiner Pettenthal Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Keller**

The grapes for the 2012 Pettenthal Spätlese were collected on November 6<sup>th</sup> this year- the same day that the grapes for the Grosses Gewächs from this vineyard were brought in. This is an absolutely beautiful bottle of Spätlese, offering up a perfumed bouquet of peach, orange, bee pollen, wild yeasts, slate minerality, citrus blossoms and just a whisper of petrol. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and transparent, with a lovely core, crisp acids and a long, gossamer-strung finish. Simply a beautiful wine. 2017-2040. **94+.**

**2012 Westhofener Abtserde Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Keller**

The 2012 Abtserde Spätlese is truly a lovely wine and a strong indication that this vintage did not only succeed for drier styled wines. The beautiful bouquet offers up scents of peach, tangerine, chalky minerality, citrus peel, bee pollen and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and snappy, with lovely mineral drive, nascent complexity and fine length and grip on the filigreed and beautifully focused finish. Lovely wine. 2016-2040. **92+.**

**2012 Niersteiner Pettenthal Riesling Auslese- Weingut Keller**

The 2012 Pettenthal Auslese is made from beautiful golden berries that were slightly shriveled by dehydration from the wine, rather than from botrytis, and this will be a beautiful Auslese to age. The very, very pure and stunning nose jumps from the glass in a blend of fresh pineapple, tangerine, honeycomb, orange zest, slate and a topnote fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full and again very pure and mineral, with lovely filigree, superb acids and a very, very long, focused and light on its feet finish. This will be a cellar treasure in the years to come. 2018-2050. **94+.**

**2012 Westhofener Abtserde Riesling Auslese- Weingut Keller**

The 2012 Abtserde Auslese has just a faint touch of very clean botrytis and is a paradigm of purity and precision. The gorgeously pure nose wafts from the glass in a blend of fresh pineapple, tangerine, honeycomb, very intense, chalky minerality and a floral topnote redolent of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and gloriously delineated, with a fine core, crisp acids and laser-like focus on the beautifully complex, very long and dancing finish. I love very gently-glazed Auslesen such as this 2012 from the Abtserde, as in my experience, they age gloriously well. 2017-2050. **95.**

**2012 Westhofener Morstein Riesling Auslese- Weingut Keller**

The Morstein “regular” Auslese was produced entirely from golden berries in 2012 and saw no botrytis. It is an utterly brilliant young bottle of Auslese and will likely age forever. The brilliant bouquet soars from the glass in a constellation of orange, candied grapefruit, honeycomb, orange zest, plenty of limestone minerality, citrus blossoms and a touch of pineapple. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully pure on the attack, with a rock solid core, electric acidity and a marvelously pure and laser-like finish of unimaginable length. This is one of the most profound wines in the Keller cellars this year, and given how brilliant the Grosses Gewächs bottlings are in 2012, that is saying something! For those curious about the special gifts of non-botrytized Auslesen, this is a wine for you. 2019-2060+. **98.**



*Harvesting the Queen's section of Hipping in November- 2/3 of these grapes ended up as the Hipping "R" bottling.*

**2012 Niersteiner Pettenthal Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Keller**

The 2012 Pettenthal Goldkapsel Auslese was produced from a blend of sixty percent golden berries and forty percent gently botrytized grapes. The vibrant bouquet offers up a gorgeous spectrum of nectarine, clementine, honeycomb, orange zest, a beautiful dollop of slate, citrus blossoms and orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and very crisp, with a lovely, delicate glaze of clean botrytis, beautiful mid-palate depth, laser-like focus and simply stunning length and grip on the pure and wonderfully complex finish. 2018-2050. **96.**

**2012 Westhofener Morstein Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Weingut Keller**

The 2012 Morstein Goldkapsel Auslese was produced entirely from grapes that had been dehydrated by *passerillage*, and so its sugars and acids were concentrated naturally (primarily by the wind) while the grapes were still on the vine, rather than by noble rot. The result is one of the most magical young Auslesen I have ever tasted, offering up a simply brilliant bouquet of apricot, orange, honeycomb, beautifully complex minerality, orange zest and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and magically pure, with a great core of fruit, electric acidity, stunning complexity and endless length on the flawless, dancing and amazingly light and delicate finish. A hauntingly profound young Auslese! 2016-2070. **99.**

**2012 Dalsheimer Hubacker Riesling Auslese \*\*\*- Weingut Keller**

The Keller 2012 Dalsheimer Hubacker Riesling Auslese \*\*\* was also produced from completely shriveled, golden berries, rather than from botrytized grapes, and it is a brilliant wine. The glorious bouquet offers up a blend of apricot, oranges, mango, salty soil tones, citrus zest, honey and orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and laser-like in its focus, with racy, ripe acids, lovely filigree and stunning length and grip on the pure and endless finish. A great, great sweet wine in the making. 2015-2060. **97.**

**2012 Westhofener Morstein Riesling Beerenauslese- Weingut Keller**

The only 2012 Beerenauslese that I tasted from Klaus-Peter Keller on this visit was this profound Morstein BA, which was again produced from grapes that were shriveled on the vine by *passerillage*, rather than botrytis and probably contains almost no nobly-rotten grapes. The wine is stunning, soaring from the glass in a blaze of orange, apricot, a touch of new leather, mango, orange zest, almost salty minerality and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a much more tropical fruit-driven personality than the Morstein Goldkapsel, with a great core, insanely ripe and snappy acids, great balance and a very, complex, long and laser-like finish. Utterly magical wine and every bit as profound as the Goldkapsel from the Morstein this year- though displaying a completely different spectrum of aromatics and flavors from its even later picking. 2013-2060+. **99.**

**Nahe****Weingut Hermann Dönnhoff (Oberhäusern)**

*Helmut Dönnhoff was very, very content with the quality of the 2012 vintage at his estate in Oberhäusern, as he observed that the must weights in this vintage were very good, despite the lack of botrytis, and the entire range has turned out very well. The domaine continues to turn out truly superb dry Rieslings these days, and the lineup in 2012 will be a very strong follow-up to the great range of dry wines produced here in 2011- which may still rank as the greatest year for dry wines at Weingut Dönnhoff. Herr Dönnhoff observed that the Nahe is particularly well-situated for the production of dry wines, for “the slates in the Nahe are “dry” slates, with bit higher limestone content than those found in the Mosel, which have a higher oil content” and the*



*constitution of the “Nahe’s dry slates allows them to absorb a bit of water over the course of the growing season and perhaps better buffer acids for dry wines.” There is no doubt that Weingut Dönnhoff continues to fine tune their lineup of dry Rieslings with each passing vintage- from what was already a very high level a decade ago- and lovers of dry Nahe Rieslings are going to have an embarrassment of riches to choose from with the Dönnhoff lineup in 2012. I had loved the noble sweet wines at this estate last year, which were probably the best overall vintage for sweet wines at Weingut Dönnhoff since the 2005ers, and which travelled in the same lofty altitude as the dry wines in that vintage. In 2012, the range of Dönnhoff sweeter styled wines is also excellent, but perhaps they cannot quite match the consistent brilliance of the corresponding wines in 2011. The harvest started here on October 8<sup>th</sup> for the Pinot Blanc vineyards, with the Riesling harvest getting started a week later. Helmut Dönnhoff noted that the acids are a touch higher in 2012 than 2011, and the wines across the board have slightly lower alcohol levels than the previous year, but that stylistically, the vintages are not too far apart. As the wines had not yet been submitted to the lab for final analysis at the time of my visit, figures for alcohol levels and the like are approximations. The 2012 Dönnhoff range is excellent across the board, with wines of great distinction, sparkling soil signatures and lovely acid structures for long and classic aging.*

### **Dry Wines**

#### **2012 Estate Riesling Trocken- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2012 Estate Riesling Trocken from Weingut Dönnhoff is a lovely wine, with alcohol in the 11.5 to 11.8 percent and a fine base of minerality to augment the very stylish fruit tones. The bouquet offers up scents of grapefruit, slate, petrol wild yeasts, citrus peel and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, long and crisp, with lovely focus and grip, bright acids and fine mineral drive on the backend. This is a really delightful bottle of dry Riesling for everyday drinking and would be great as a wine by the glass for restaurants. 2013-2025+. **88.**

#### **2012 Tonschiefer Riesling Trocken- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2012 Tonschiefer is primarily sourced from the Leistenberg vineyard, with probably ninety percent of the bottling hailing from this vineyard, which is augmented by small parcels in the Hermannshöhle and other neighboring vineyards that have the same type of slate as the Leistenberg. This is a really a superb bottle in the making, offering up a classy aromatic blend that is more refined than the Estate Riesling Trocken, with notes of white cherries, grapefruit, complex slate tones, smoke and orange peel wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and very elegant, with crisp, buffered acids, fine focus and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. Good juice. 2014-2030. **89+.**

#### **2012 Kahlenberg Riesling Trocken- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2012 Trocken from the Kahlenberg vineyard should come in around 12.8 percent alcohol this year, and as was the case last year, this is a really a beautiful bottle of dry Riesling. The superb and smoky nose offers up a combination of tart orange, complex, quartzite soil tones, wild yeasts, gentle herbal tones, citrus zest and the aforementioned smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very suave, with a great core of fruit, ripe acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This is really the quality of a very good Grosses Gewächs at a fraction of the price! 2014-2030+. **91.**



### **2012 Höllenpfad Riesling Trocken- Weingut Dönnhoff**

And the new wine in the portfolio? The 2012 Höllenpfad Riesling Trocken is a fine follow-up to the debut vintage of 2011. Helmut Dönnhoff observed that the Höllenpfad vineyard is comprised of red sandstone soils, and these soils “always provide softer acids than slate or quartzite soils, which really works well for dry wines.” The 2012 should come in at around the same octane level as the Kahlenberg and offers up a very stylish bouquet of pear, tart orange, beautifully complex soil tones, wild yeasts, lemongrass and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and elegant, with a superb core, lovely focus and grip and a very long, complex finish. This does not have quite the cut of the Kahlenberg, but it has plenty of acidity and will age beautifully, Fine, fine juice. 2014-2030+. **91.**



*A good view of the red sandstone soils found in the Roxheimer Höllenpfad vineyard of Weingut Dönnhoff.*

### **2012 Felsenberg “Türmchen” Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2012 Türmchen Grosses Gewächs should come in around 13.4 percent alcohol, which may be just a touch lower than in 2011, and the new vintage seems likely to give its counterpart from one year ago serious competition for ultimate quality six or seven years down the road. The beautifully complex and classy nose delivers a blend of grapefruit, white grape, wild yeasts, gentle smokiness, a hint of fresh nutmeg and a floral topnote redolent of white lilies. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with great focus, ripe acids and stunning backend energy and grip on the very long and classy finish. This is a beautiful vintage for this fine wine, and at this early stage, it is hard to choose a favorite between the 2011 and the 2012 versions. 2019-2040. **93+.**

### **2012 Dellchen Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2012 Dellchen Grosses Gewächs is a superb wine in the making, jumping from the glass in a youthfully complex mélange of grapefruit, tart orange, wild yeasts, complex slate tones, citrus peel and smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and has laser-like focus, with a rock solid core, ripe acids and a very, very long, primary finish. This superb Grosses Gewächs will need a good six or seven years' worth of bottle age to really blossom and come into its own, and it should prove to very long-lived. 2020-2045+. **94.**

### **2012 Hermannshöhle Riesling Grosses Gewächs – Weingut Dönnhoff**

I mentioned how impressed I had been last year with the brilliance of the 2011 Hermannshöhle Grosses Gewächs to Herr Dönnhoff, and he suggested it would be fun to taste it again after sampling the 2012 version- which made for a very interesting comparison indeed. I gave a very, very slight nod to the more extroverted 2011, but the 2012 is very, very close in potential. The 2012 Hermannshöhle Grosses Gewächs offers up a young and stunning aromatic blend of tart apple, pink grapefruit, a touch of rosemary, petrol, slate, wild yeasts, smoky overtones and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very precise, with a rock solid core, crystalline minerality, brisk acids and stunning length and grip on the snappy finish. A great wine in the making! 2020-2045+. **95+.**

### **2012 Weissburgunder Trocken- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2012 Weissburgunder Trocken weighs in around 12.5 percent alcohol this year, which is quite a bit lower than the riper 2011 version. The wine is very pretty, offering up a generous bouquet of apples, spring flowers, orange peel, a touch of straw and a stylish base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and snappy, with a fine core and good grip on the long and juicy finish. Good juice. 2013-2020+. **88.**

### **2012 Grauburgunder Trocken- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2012 Pinot Gris is also around 12.5 percent alcohol this year, making this close to one percent lower in alcohol than the more powerful version in 2011. It is a very elegant example of Pinot Gris as a result, offering up a lovely nose of oranges, apples, a touch of lemongrass, white flowers and good soil signature. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and vibrant, with a lovely core of fruit, crisp acids and very good length and grip on the focused and classy finish. 2013-2025. **89.**

### ***Classic Off-Dry and Noble Sweet Wines***

#### **2012 Dönnhoff Riesling QbA**

The 2012 Estate Riesling QbA has about 25 grams per liter of residual sugar this year, but because of the vintage's lovely acids and striking minerality, it comes across as nearly dry. The very pretty nose wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, white cherries, lovely slate tones, petrol and a floral topnote redolent of cherry blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and complex, with a very soil-driven personality, fine mid-palate depth and fine length and grip on the bouncy and wide open finish. This is delicious. 2013-2020. **88.**

#### **2012 Kreuznacher Krötenpfuhl Riesling Kabinett – Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2012 Krötenpfuhl Kabinett is succulent and forward in style, with lovely purity and complexity evident right out of the blocks. The classy nose offers up scents of apple, pear, a touch of lavender and a marvelous base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and complex, with fairly broad shoulders, ripe acids and lovely length and grip on the very elegant and juicy finish. A superb bottle for drinking early on, but with the requisite balance to age very well. 2013-2035. **90+.**

### **2012 Oberhäuser Leistenberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2012 Leistenberg Kabinett is really a superb wine, with its obvious Spätlese must weights delivered in a very classic Kabinett-like sensibility of filigree and lovely minerality. The beautifully complex nose offers up scents of white grape, pear, complex slate tones, a touch of petrol and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and vibrant, with a succulent core of fruit, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and dancing finish. The 2012 Leistenberg Kabinett will certainly be accessible from the start, but I would dry to give the wine at least five years in the cellar to really blossom and allow its secondary layers of complexity to fully emerge. A beautiful Kabinett in the more modern vein of climate change. 2018-2035+. **93.**

### **2012 Norheimer Kirschheck Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2012 Kirschheck Spätlese is a very pretty and ripe bottle, offering up an inviting bouquet of pear, peach, bee pollen, slate, lilacs and lovely, esthery topnotes. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and juicy, with a lovely core, crisp acids and superb length and grip on the pure and perfectly focused finish. This is not as filigreed as some Kirschheck Spätlesen can be, but it is very pretty in a more succulent style. Like the wine above, there will be no difficulties drinking this wine right from the outset, but I would be strongly inclined to give it a bit of bottle age to let some secondary complexity emerge. But, if you choose to drink this wine in the blush of youth, I will certainly understand why, as it is going to be pretty irresistible from the start. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2035. **92.**

### **2012 Schlossböckelheimer Felsenberg “Türmchen” Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2012 Türmchen” Spätlese is a very pretty wine, but it cannot quite keep pace with its 2011 counterpart. The wine offers up a bouquet of apple, white cherries, petrol, slate, bee pollen and a gently floral topnote of lilacs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and youthful, with a fine core, good acids and a long, primary and promising finish. This is a very pretty wine that will need a good five years in the cellar to blossom and allow some of its secondary layers to emerge. 2018-2035. **91+.**

### **2012 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2012 Dönnhoff Brücke Spätlese is a beautifully inviting wine that is quite forward this year- at least by the very high standards for longevity of this bottling. The very classy nose offers up a mix of pear, tangerine, apple pie spice tones, slate, orange blossoms and bee pollen. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and suave, with lovely focus and nascent complexity, lovely mid-palate depth, bright acids and very good length and grip on the finish. A very pretty wine that will drink well with only a few years of bottle age, but will have no problems aging long and gracefully as well. 2017-2035+. **93.**

### **2012 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The 2012 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Spätlese from Weingut Dönnhoff is a beautiful wine in the making, wafting from the glass in a complex and very pure and elegant mélange of pear, white cherries, orange zest, slate, a touch of petrol, bee pollen and violets. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long, pure and nicely reserved, with a fine core, ripe acids and superb length and grip on the very refined and youthful finish. A gorgeous wine in the making, but again, there is even a tad more electricity to be found in the 2011 version. 2018-2035+. **93+.**

### **2012 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Goldkapsel Auslese- Weingut Dönnhoff**

As I noted in the article on the history of this great estate a few years ago, for Helmut Dönnhoff, any wine labeled as Auslese needs to be a botrytis wine by definition, and the 2012 Hermannshöhle Auslese contains about twenty percent botrytized berries this year. It is a

stunningly pure and soil-driven example of Auslese, soaring from the glass in a vibrant and refined constellation of white cherries, candied violets, bee pollen, a touch of tangerine, slate and sweet grapefruit. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and stunningly complex and filigreed, with great purity and focus, ripe acids and superb length and grip on the dancing and magical finish. This is a great bottle of Auslese in the making. 2019-2040+. **96.**

**2012 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Goldkapsel Auslese- Weingut Dönnhoff**

While the 2012 Brücke Auslese has a fair bit more botrytis than the Hermannshöhle Auslese this year, but it cannot quite match the same purity and precision of that wine. The very succulent nose offers up scents of apple, orange, slate, a touch of petrol, ripe pineapple, bee pollen and orange blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and racy, with lovely focus and complexity, a fine core, bright acids and a long, vibrant and juicy finish that closes with a fine synthesis of tropical fruit and minerality. This is a lovely wine, but I am totally drawn to the more refined filigree of the Hermannshöhle Auslese in 2012. 2019-2040. **94.**

**2012 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Eiswein- Weingut Dönnhoff**

The Dönnhoff family picked two small lots of Eiswein this year, one on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December and the other on the 13<sup>th</sup>, and Helmut Dönnhoff decided that they would be better blended together to make one bottling, rather than have two tiny bottlings of each individual picking. The wine shows off the inherent elegance of the vintage in its beautiful bouquet, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple pie, lilacs, pears, slate, honeycomb and esthery topnotes that recall apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and filigreed, with a lovely core of fruit, zesty acids and a long, pure and electric finish. This is an exotically delicate wine of great harmony and beauty. 2013-2055. **96.**

**Weingut Emrich-Schönleber (Monzingen)**

*The Weingut Emrich-Schönleber wines were in varying stages of preparation for bottling at the time of my March visit, but it was very clear that the great potential of the 2012 vintage has not been squandered by the Schönleber family and this is a stellar range of wines in the making. The dry Rieslings are all generally in the 12 to 12.5 percent alcohol range this year, which to my palate, seems to be the level of ripeness where the minerality really takes center stage and the wines are beautifully detailed and precise. The Schönleber family has been producing some of Germany's greatest dry Rieslings for many years, but in many vintages their inherent elegance and refinement is often a bit hidden behind their superb structural attributes and takes a few years of bottle age to really show in all of its complexity and nuance. Not so with this great range of 2012ers, which was already very expressive and so wonderfully defined by the underlying minerality in each wine that the wines were already a great joy to taste and really very tempting to think about drinking early on in their evolutions. However, I think this is more a reflection of how flawlessly balanced the 2012ers are here this year, and that they will prove to once again be some of the most long-lived dry wines in all of Germany and they seem likely to really develop brilliantly with some bottle age. Happily, on the end of my German chapter of this long spring trip, I was generously served a bottle of the stunning 2004 Halenberg Grosses Gewächs "Auf de Lay" (which was drinking brilliantly and whose note I have included at the tail end of this section) which fully underscored just how beautifully the wines from Weingut Emrich-Schönleber blossom with sufficient bottle age and which served to steel my will to plan to cellar my 2012ers from this superb and underrated estate for their proper time period in my cellar*

*prior to starting to pull corks. This is a great, great vintage for the Schönleber family and destined to be one of the classic years for their lovely wines!*

### **Dry 2012ers**

#### **2012 Weissburgunder Trocken- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2012 Weissburgunder Trocken from Weingut Emrich-Schönleber is a lovely example of the vintage, weighing in at a ripe, but elegant thirteen percent alcohol and showing off lovely focus and balance. The bright and wide open nose offers up scents of peach, papaya, a touch of wheat toast, a lovely base of soil and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with a fine core, bright acids and lovely length and grip. Classy Pinot Blanc. 2013-2020+. **89.**

#### **2012 Grauburgunder Trocken “S”- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2012 Grauburgunder Trocken “S” is another really lovely wine in the making, offering up a complex and very vibrant aromatic mélange of tangerine, apple, wheat toast, a complex base of soil and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and snappy, with a fine core, impressive delineation and a long, zesty finish that closes with superb grip. This was probably the finest example of Pinot Gris that I tasted on the entire trip and a wine that will be well worth keeping an eye out for in the market, as it will be a terrific value! 2013-2020+. **90.**

#### **2012 Estate Riesling Trocken- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2012 Estate Riesling Trocken is a beautiful wine that will very happily all be bottled under natural cork this year- despite requests from some importers for some of the wine to go under screwcap- as the Schönleber family has not been happy with the evolution of a few previous vintages of this wine that they have kept in their cellars under screwcap and are convinced that the wines age better under cork. Needless to say, this is a sentiment I am in complete accord with and was very happy to hear of their courageous decision to place the quality of the wine’s evolution above the desires of some of their importers! The wine is going to be lovely in 2012 (and a great value), as it offers up a fine and impressively complex bouquet of lime, pear, petrol, lovely slate underpinnings, a bit of smokiness and a gentle topnote of fresh botanicals. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and very soil-driven in personality, with a fine core and a very long, focused and racy finish. An absolute steal in this vintage! 2013-2025+. **90.**

#### **2012 Riesling “Mineral” Trocken- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2012 Mineral Trocken is exceptional, soaring from the glass in a complex and vibrant aromatic blend of grapefruit, lime, a glorious mineral bath of slate, citrus peel, petrol and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very precise, with a rock solid core, lovely focus and balance and a very long, racy finish that closes with excellent cut and grip. A terrific young bottle of dry Riesling and another exceptional value in 2012. 2014-2030+. **91+.**

#### **2012 Monzinger Frühlingsplätzchen Riesling Trocken “S”- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2012 Frühlingsplätzchen Trocken “S” is a terrific wine in the making, offering up a deep and youthful bouquet of lime, apple and other green-tinged fruit, beautifully complex soil tones, plenty of smokiness, just a whisper of fresh herbs and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a fine core, ripe acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and promising finish. This was still a work in progress

as far as the final blend would be, and so I have scored the wine within a range. 2014-2030. **91-92.**

**2012 Monzinger Halenberg Riesling Trocken “S”- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

In 2012 the Halenberg Trocken “S” was also still in the final stage of decision-making as to how the final blend would be comprised, and for that reason I have also scored this wine within a range. It will be a superb bottle, as it offers up an excellent bouquet of grapefruit, tart pear, lime, a complex base of slatey minerality, petrol, a touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and racy, with excellent mid-palate depth, a very soil-driven personality and a very long, focused and racy finish. This is going to be a superb example of the vintage. 2014-2030. **91-92+.**

**2012 Frühlingsplätzchen Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2012 Frühlingsplätzchen Grosses Gewächs had already been assembled and the final blend decided upon at the time of my visit, and there will be two casks of this lovely wine produced in this vintage. This is going to be a superb bottle, but it will want six or seven years of bottle age to really reach its apogee. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a youthful blend of gooseberry, white currant, lime zest, smoke, petrol, a beautifully complex base of soil and a gentle topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with laser-like focus, a rock solid core, racy acids and simply superb length and grip on the perfectly-balanced and very classy young finish. A dynamite wine in the making. 2019-2040. **93+.**

**2012 Halenberg Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2012 Halenberg Grosses Gewächs is another absolutely stunning wine in the making. The youthful and extremely promising bouquet is a blend of green apple, tart orange, lime, petrol, plenty of smokiness, a very, very complex base of soil and a vibrant topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very, very elegant, with a rock solid core, superb soil inflection, racy acids and laser-like focus on the very, very long finish that closes with impressive, nascent complexity and excellent grip. A superb wine in the making. 2020-2040+. **94+.**

**2012 Monzinger Frühlingsplätzchen “Auf de Lay”- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

As is the Schönleber family’s custom, the Auf de Lay will only be bottled in magnums this year, and it is a magically complex wine in the making. The deep and crystalline nose soars from the glass in a blend of lime, white cherries, a touch of yellow plum, slate, petrol, wild yeasts, gentle mossiness and a topnote of smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very refined, with lovely mid-palate depth, nascent complexity, ripe, zesty acids and superb focus and grip on the very long, poised and filigreed finish. This is a simply stunning young vintage of Auf de Lay! 2020-2045+. **95+.**

**2012 Monzinger Halenberg “R”- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2012 Halenberg “R” bottling from Emrich-Schönleber is really lovely and a great wine in the making, but we had the chance to sample it alongside the great 2011 version, and as stunning as the 2012 will be in the fullness of time, it looks as if the 2011er will edge it out by a nose. The young and glorious bouquet offers up scents of yellow plums, gooseberry, fresh mint, a complex base of slate, incipient notes of petrol, wild yeasts and a touch of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully delineated, with a fine core, crisp acids and great minerality on the very, very long, focused and classy finish. There is just a whisper of residual sweetness on the backend today that beautifully buffers the acids and minerality. A beautiful wine in the making by any stretch of the imagination. 2020-2045+. **94.**





*Werner Schönleber a few years back at the auction at Bad Kreuznach with a magnum of Auf de Lay.*

#### **2004 Monzinger Frühlingsplätzchen “Auf de Lay”- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

My good friend, Markus Strobel, served us the 2004 Auf de Lay as an aperitif after a very long week of tasting was being topped off with some lovely, maturing Chandon de Briailles wines to recalibrate the palate to Pinot Noir on the eve of my departure for my ten day *stage* in Burgundy on this trip. Back in the 2004 vintage, the Auf de Lay bottling was not produced exclusively in magnums (as it is today), but it was still only available at the auction in Bad Kreuznach. The 2004 Auf de Lay has now reached maturity and is drinking brilliantly well, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of lime, pears, gentle notes of petrol, a bit of fresh mint, a lovely and quite complex base of soil tones and a dollop of youthful grapefruit still in evidence. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and wide open for inspection, with a lovely core of fruit, gorgeous elegance and focus, ripe acids and great length and grip on the bright and beautifully complex finish. This wine still has plenty of years ahead of it, but at age nine, it has really reached a beautiful point for primetime drinking. 2013-2028+. **94.**

#### ***Prädikat 2012ers***

#### **2012 Monzinger Frühlingsplätzchen Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2012 Frühlingsplätzchen Spätlese is a lovely wine, offering up a deep and complex nose of lime, apple, a lovely base of slate, gentle mossy overtones, smoke, lime zest and bee pollen. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and nicely fleshy, with crisp acids, lovely complexity and really fine length and grip on the focused finish. This is more Auslese in weight

than true Spätlese, but it is beautifully balanced and refined in this slightly more opulent style. 2017-2035+. **91+**.

### **2012 Monzinger Halenberg Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Emrich-Schönleber**

The 2012 Halenberg Spätlese from Weingut Emrich-Schönleber was fermented entirely with wild yeasts this year and as a result seems to have the slight leg up in terms of complexity from the above wine. The beautiful bouquet is very elegant and complex, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of white cherries, kafir lime, beeswax, a touch of bee pollen, slate, petrol and white flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and very refined, with a fine core, ripe and bright acids, superb focus and lovely grip on the complex, pure and very long finish. Just a lovely, lovely wine in the making. 2015-2035+. **94.**

### **Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich (Bockenau)**

*Tim Fröhlich has produced another absolutely lovely range of wines in 2012- which is exactly what I think I said when first tasting his 2010ers and 2011ers! He is a man on quite a roll and each year he seems to perfectly capture the potential inherent in the vintage and craft a superb range of both dry and noble sweet wines. 2012 is no exception to this recent trend, and there are some absolutely stellar wines resting comfortably in the Schäfer-Fröhlich cellars awaiting bottling. He noted that this was an extremely long harvest this year, as he and his team began picking the Pinot Noir on October 10<sup>th</sup>, but did not finish gathering all of the Riesling bunches until November 15<sup>th</sup>. Incidentally, all of the Pinot Noir this year was earmarked for the Blanc de Noirs cuvée. There is a new bottling here this year, as the estate has begun producing a Grosses Gewächs from their parcel in the Bockenau vineyard of Stromberg, which has added a superb new addition to the G.G. lineup, as well as a very stunning Feinherb bottling from a single large cask of Stromberg that stopped its fermentation with more residual sugar than is allowed for a Grosses Gewächs bottling- it will be a great value and a wine to look for when it is released for fans of German wines with just a bit of residual sweetness. I know that the estate used to have much of their parcel in the Stromberg planted with Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris, and I am not sure if they have grafted over these rootstocks to Riesling, always had this parcel of Riesling and used it for other cuvées, or simply purchased more land in this grand cru vineyard. In any case, 2012 is the first vintage for a Grosses Gewächs from the Stromberg, which has been produced from a parcel of fifty-five to sixty year-old Riesling vines and is a fine new addition that folks should be on the lookout for when it is released in the fall. The Grosses Gewächs bottlings here were still pretty difficult to taste at the time of my visit, as they remained still resting on their fine lees in cask and were a pretty cloudy and yeasty group to taste in mid-March, but with some coaxing, their quality and style began to take shape in the glass. That said, it may well prove that they will be even better than my notes suggest, so consider the scores as baselines from which they may stretch their wings and climb further up in the years to come.*

### **2012 Fröhlich Blanc de Noirs Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2012 Blanc de Noirs is a lovely wine that is already bottled and was showing plenty of charm and bounce during my visit. The bouquet is a pretty blend of melon, apple, orange peel and a nice touch of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and crisp, with very respectable depth, good acids and a long, crisp and classy finish. This is a very tasty bottle that should drink well for the next five to seven years. 2013-2018+. **87.**

### **2012 Fröhlich Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2012 Fröhlich Trocken has been produced entirely from forty year-old Müller-Thurgau vines that are planted on volcanic soils. This is one of the best bottlings from this varietal that I have ever tasted from the Nahe (admittedly, a very small sampling), offering up a bright and sassy nose of green fruit, complex minerality, smoke and a touch of moss. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance and a very long, soil-driven finish that closes with fine grip. In my experience, most Müller-Thurgau bottlings are about the minerality, and the 2012 version from Tim Fröhlich does a beautiful job of displaying its underlying minerality in a very stylish manner. Lovely juice. 2013-2025. **88.**

### **2012 Estate Riesling Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2012 Estate Riesling Trocken from Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich is likely to weigh in around twelve percent alcohol (no final analysis has been done for most of the wines here) and is produced from the younger vines in the grand cru sites. The lovely bouquet delivers a mix of grapefruit, petrol, lemongrass, wild yeast, citrus peel and a nice base of slate. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with fine focus, a very good core, racy acids and lovely length and grip on the poised and balanced finish. Give this wine a year in bottle to really blossom. It will be an excellent value. 2014-2030. **88.**

### **2012 Vulkangestein Riesling Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

As readers will recall, the Vulkangestein Trocken bottling hails from selected volcanic soils in the estate's grand cru vineyards, with the vines all old vines, and in contrast to 2011, when the grapes earmarked for this cuvée were harvested on the early side, about fifty percent of the blend here was made from grapes picked in November. The 2012 will come in around 12.8 percent alcohol and is really a lovely wine (and another stellar value), jumping from the glass in a mix of grapefruit, lemon, complex, volcanic soils, lemongrass, wild yeasts and citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and beautifully transparent, with a fine core, ripe acids and excellent length and grip on the classy and focused finish. Fine juice. 2014-2030+. **90+.**

### **2012 Schiefergestein Bockenaur Riesling Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The Schiefergestein bottling is another stellar dry Riesling in the making in 2012, with the grapes all hailing from the grand cru vineyard of Felseneck and all at least from thirty year-old vines. The deep and youthful nose offers up a vibrant mélange of tart orange, petrol, wild yeasts, smoky tones and gentle notes of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very refined, with lovely focus and balance, very good mid-palate depth, ripe acids and a very long, nascently complex finish. High class wine. 2015-2035. **91.**

### **2012 Kupfergrube Riesling Grosses Gewächs - Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

As I have noted in the past, Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich has only a small, half a hectare parcel in the great Kupfergrube vineyard in Schlossböckelheim, so this is the smallest production Grosses Gewächs in their fine lineup of grand crus. The 2012 version shows off the lovely and very elegant personality of this vintage, delivering a classic bouquet of tart orange, grapefruit, wild yeasts, a very complex base of soil, orange peel and petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young, pure and racy, with a great core of fruit, superb focus and outstanding cut and grip on the very long and youthful finish. I love this vineyard, and in a vintage where the Grosses Gewächs is likely to come in around thirteen percent alcohol, there is a refinement here this year that is really exceptional. 2020-2050. **93+.**

### **2012 Felsenberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs - Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2012 Felsenberg Grosses Gewächs bottling is a superb wine in the making, with the volcanic soils here (as in the nearby Kupfergrube) really reacting favorably to the very elegant profile of the 2012 vintage and offers up a very stony personality out of the blocks. The deep, young and absolutely classic nose is a blend of grapefruit, lemon, smoke, citrus peel, a touch of petrol, wild yeasts and a beautiful base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a rock solid core (no pun intended), brisk, but very ripe acids, superb transparency and outstanding length and grip on the pure, focused and youthful finish. This will be a terrific wine and probably just nose out the beautiful Kupfergrube a decade down the road. 2022-2050. **94.**

### **2012 Frühlingsplätzchen Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2012 Frühlingsplätzchen Grosses Gewächs from Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich is produced all from old vines, with the range from forty-five to sixty-plus years of age. The red slate soils of this vineyard make a nice contrast with the porphyry of the last two wines, offering up a complex and classy bouquet of tart orange, a touch of fresh pineapple, citrus peel, slate, smoky overtones and a gently herbal topnote that adds a lovely savory element to the nose. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and racy, with a great core, ripe acids and superb length and grip on the nascently complex finish. Lovely juice. 2020-2050. **93+.**

### **2012 Halenberg Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

As I have observed in the past, the Halenberg vineyard's combination of ninety percent blue slate and ten percent quartzite often gives the resulting wines from this site such unique and compelling aromatic and flavor profiles, with mossy and fresh herb tones really adding an additional dimension. The 2012 Halenberg Grosses Gewächs from Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich is excellent, with a youthfully reserved personality on both the nose and palate reluctantly offering up an aromatic mix of tart orange, sweet grapefruit, plenty of smokiness, wild yeasts, slate, complex, gently herbal tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very promising, with nascent complexity, lovely mid-palate depth, bright acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, sleek and classy finish. This will be a beautiful wine in the fullness of time. 2022-2050. **94.**

### **2012 Stromberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The Stromberg vineyard's soil composition is a bit unique in Bockenau (or at least to my experience), as it is volcanic, rather than slate. However, as Tim Fröhlich observes, "the volcanic soils here are more rocky here than in the grand crus in Schlossböckelheim (Felsenberg and Kupfergrube), making for a far different style of wine." The 2012 Stromberg is a stunning first vintage for this wine, soaring from the glass in a mix of lemon, tart orange, petrol, a superb base of minerality, citrus peel, green apple, wild yeasts and a touch of petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very pure, with great precision and grip, racy acids and excellent focus on the very long and youthfully complex finish. This is stellar. 2020-2050. **94.**

### **2012 Felseneck Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2012 Felseneck Riesling Grosses Gewächs is a fine follow-up to the utterly magical 2011 version, offering up a deep and marvelously defined bouquet of tart pear, pink grapefruit, wild yeasts, petrol, complex slate tones, citrus zest and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure, with a great core of fruit, ripe, snappy acids, laser-like focus and superb length and grip on the nascently complex and very, very promising finish. Great juice. 2020-2050+. **95+.**

### **2012 Bockenaur Weissburgunder Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The Weissburgunder Trocken from Schäfer-Fröhlich all hails from red slate vineyards in the village of Bockenau, and for the last two vintages, this wine has not gone through malolactic. The 2012 is a very pretty wine- perhaps not overly complex, but, long and classy. The nose is a blend of apple, wheat toast, spring flowers and a nice underpinning of slate soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and juicy on the attack, with nice back end bounce from bright acids, and lovely focus and grip. Good juice. 2013-2020. **87.**

### **2012 Bockenaur Weissburgunder “S” Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The Weissburgunder “S” Trocken bottling from Tim Fröhlich is made from a selection of Pinot Blanc vines that are forty-five years of age and planted in the steepest section of the vineyard, and the wine sees some new wood during its *elevage*. The 2012 “S” is quite good, but I do not like it any more than the regular bottling, despite its superior raw materials. The bouquet shows a fair bit of new wood in its blend of pear, apple, wheat toast, soil and vanillin wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly oaky on the backend, with a good core and soil signature, fine grip and a long finish. Perhaps it would be more interesting and reverse the use of new wood- giving it to the younger vines and allowing the older vines to stand on their own? 2013-2020. **87.**

### **2012 Bockenaur Grauburgunder Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2012 Pinot Gris from Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich is made from a blend of stainless steel and old *fuder* fermentation, with some of the blend seeing spontaneous fermentation from native yeasts and some using purchased yeasts. The 2012 has benefited from the elegance of this vintage and offers up a lovely nose of apple, peach, a touch of orange zest, wheat chaff, spring flowers and perhaps just a whisper of wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and focused, with good ripeness, bright acids and just a touch of backend heat on the long and generous finish. Good juice for near-term drinking. 2013-2020. **88.**

### **2012 Bockenaur Grauburgunder “R” Trocken- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The Pinot Gris “R” bottling all hails from red slate soils, is fermented entirely with indigenous yeasts and sees about ten to twelve percent new oak during its *elevage*. The wine is really lovely (perhaps taking to its new wood more seamlessly than the Pinot Blanc version), offering up a classy bouquet of apple, peach, vanillin oak, smoke, apple blossoms and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with very good acids, fine focus and grip and a long, classy finish. This is really a lovely example. 2013-2020+. **90.**

### **2012 Vulkangestein Riesling Feinherb- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

This is the bottling produced from the one large *fuder* of Stromberg that stopped fermentation with still too much residual sugar to qualify as a Trocken (and hence, Grosses Gewächs classification). This is going to be a very fine value, as the wine is very pretty and shows off its grand cru pedigree in its youthful nose of pink grapefruit, orange peel, a complex base of soil tones, wild yeasts and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and crisp, with lovely focus and bounce, a lovely core, bright acids and very good length and grip on the long and classy finish that closes with just a kiss of residual sweetness. Fine juice. 2013-2023+. **89+.**

### **2012 Bockenaur Felseneck Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2012 Felseneck Kabinett is a really pretty and dancing example of its Prädikat, with the grapes for this bottling coming from the very first Riesling harvested by the estate. The bouquet is a very pretty and lilting mélange of apple, pear, wild yeasts, petrol, slate and a topnote

of white flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and filigreed, with fine focus, nice intensity of flavor and very fine length and grip on the bright and dancing finish. The must weight here is of course well into Spätlese range, but Tim Fröhlich has really done an impressive job to give this wine a true Kabinett sensibility. Lovely wine. 2013-2030. **92.**

**2012 Bockenaur Felseneck Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

In contrast to the 2012 Felseneck Kabinett, the 2012 Felseneck Riesling Spätlese from Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich was made from grapes harvested quite late, with the bunches for this bottling collected between November 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. It was produced entirely from thirty-five year-old vines and offers up a superb bouquet of pears, white cherries, lilacs, complex slate tones, just a hint of petrol and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and zesty, with a superb signature of soil, lovely complexity, snappy acids and outstanding length and grip on the pure and dancing finish. A beautiful wine. 2016-2040. **92+.**

**2012 Bockenaur Felseneck Riesling Spätlese Goldkapsel- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2012 Felseneck Spätlese Goldkapsel is simply a more refined and pure version of the regular bottling, rather than a wine with more ripeness or a touch of botrytis. It is a truly scintillating bottle of Spätlese, wafting from the glass in an utterly ethereal combination of pear, white cherries, violets, a hint of petrol, very complex slate tones and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and beautifully filigreed and transparent, with a lovely little core of fruit, fine, racy acids and stunning length and grip on the suave and vibrant finish. A thing of beauty! 2017-2035+. **94+.**

**2012 Bockenaur Felseneck Riesling Auslese- Weingut Schäfer-Fröhlich**

The 2012 Auslese from the Felseneck contains thirty percent botrytized berries in this very clean vintage, and though the wine is clearly going to be superb, it had just had its sulfur adjusted in preparation for bottling and was really hard to taste at the time of my visit. There is great purity and gentle glazing from the inclusion of botrytized berries in the blend, but the wine was not on form and it was really impossible to take a proper note. I am absolutely certain that this will be a great wine, but I had the bad luck to catch it on an “off” day.

**Mosel**

**Weingut Willi Schaefer (Graach)**

*The short crop of 2012 was felt most keenly at Weingut Willi Schaefer in a diminished number of dry wine cuvées this year, as Christophe Schaefer noted that the vintage really was best suited here in Graach to the production of Kabinetten, Spätlesen and Auslesen, and it would make no sense to try to produce more dry wines in a vintage whose strength really lay with the noble sweet Prädikat wines. As 2011 had been a terrific year to produce dry wines in the Middle Mosel, hopefully the clientele at Weingut Schaefer has kept some tucked away in the cellar for a rainy day and will focus more on this brilliant range of 2012 Prädikat wines. The one dry wine I have a note on from the visit here in mid-March was the really lovely and filigreed Himmelreich Grosses Gewächs, which is very svelte and classy. Not only were yields down substantially at Weingut Willi Schaefer because of the difficulties at flowering and then the very small bunches on the vines, but also the estate’s parcel of Wehlener Sonnenuhr was also out of production for the most part in this vintage, as fully seventy percent of the vineyard has been grubbed up and is in the throes of being replanted. This is part of the German wine authorities ongoing efforts to “rationalize” the holdings in several of the important vineyards in the middle Mosel (there is a specific term in German for this process, but naturally, I have forgotten it!), which often requires*



*replanting to make the rows a bit more uniform and to switch around specific parcels that different owners hold in an effort to combine disparate plots into one larger and more easily-worked section of vines. I had a chance to see the huge bare tracts of the Sonnenuhr a couple days later when visiting Catarina Prüm at her family estate in Wehlen and to look across the river at all the work that was going on in the Sonnenuhr- I had fears that the Mosel Bridge Brain Trust had changed course and was now planning to plant their bridge in Wehlen instead of Ürzig, but it turned out that all the bare vineyard land and heavy machinery in the vineyard was for the “rationalizing” project and not the satanic bridge. The small part of the already very small piece of the Sonnenuhr that the Schaefer family owns that has not been grubbed up produced a very, very tiny quantity of wine that the family will keep in the cellars for the “family reserve”, as there are now two young boys who will one day want to see some of those bottles still extant in the family wine library!*



*Christophe Schaefer in the petit reserve de famille cellar of older bottles at the winery.*

*Christophe Schaefer has produced some absolutely brilliant examples of the vintage in 2012, with most of the Prädikat wines showing no botrytis and the products of the beautiful, golden berries of this glorious autumn. There are three bottlings of Auslesen (two from the Domprobst and one from the Himmelreich) that were produced from early pickings that selected out the small quantity of botrytized grapes that were out on the vines early on in the harvest season, and then the remainder of the picking focused on taking in parcels in optimally ripe condition, but with no signs of noble rot. There are two Kabinetten this year (one each from the*

*Domprobst and Himmelreich) that were harvested with must weights in the high 80s, but with true Kabinett filigree and structural sensibilities. The fermentations were on the late side here this year, so the final blending had only been decided upon a few weeks before my visit. It is hard to say whether the Spätlesen or Auslesen are the real sweet spot of the 2012 vintage at Weingut Schaefer, as both categories have produced some magical bottlings that are destined to be venerated as legends in the years to come. This is one vintage where it makes no sense, for example, to pass on one AP numbered Spätlese in the hopes of latching onto a different one with a slightly higher rating, as there is not one wine in the 2012 lineup here that is not destined to be a cellar treasure in the future. The entire range here is absolutely superb in 2012 and, as is often the case, my visit to Weingut Schaefer was one of the highlights of my week spent tasting the 2012ers.*

### **2012 Himmelreich Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The 2012 Himmelreich Grosses Gewächs is going to be a beautiful wine, as it tips the scales at a cool and classy twelve percent alcohol and is resplendent in purity and unrepentant elegance. The vibrant bouquet is a blend of grapefruit, tart orange, a beautiful base of slate, lime blossoms and gentle notes of the petrol to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and utterly refined, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance, ripe acids and superb length and grip on the nascently complex finish. Give this superb wine two or three years to start to blossom before pulling any corks! 2015-2035. **93.**

### **2012 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett AP #2- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The two Schaefer Kabinetten this year are truly lovely- perhaps not quite as delicately strung together as the 2004ers here, but truly classic Kabinetten that will make fans of this Prädikat level very, very happy. The 2012 Himmelreich Kabinett offers up a bright and very pretty nose of lime, tart orange, complex minerality, citrus blossoms and the gentlest dollop of petrol that one can imagine. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and nicely filigreed, with a sound core, ripe acids and really lovely length and grip. Despite its must weight in the high eighties, this is still quite dry and really delicate in a proper Kabinett fashion and a lovely glass of wine. The ripe and flawlessly integrated acids here will make this wine absolutely a delicious drink right out of the blocks, but it has the requisite balance and spine to age very gracefully at the same time. 2013-2030+. **92.**

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

As one would expect, the 2012 Domprobst Kabinett has a bit broader shoulders than the Himmelreich, but it too is finished off quite dry and really displays its Kabinett personality in this slightly more powerful guise. The lovely nose offers up scents of tangerine, pink grapefruit, a lovely base of slate, gentle notes of citrus peel and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and succulent on the attack, with a fine core, superb focus and excellent length and grip on the pure and classy finish. 2013-2030+. **92+.**

### **2012 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #8- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

There is only one Spätlese from the Himmelreich in 2012 and it is absolutely lovely. The very pure and expressive bouquet delivers scents of lime, green apple, kaleidoscopic minerality, a touch of violet and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is fullish, elegant and quite filigreed, with an excellent core of fruit, ripe acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and dancing finish. This is just a stunning synthesis of the inherent elegance of the 2012 vintage and the glorious purity and minerality of the Himmelreich vineyard! 2014-2035+. **93+.**

**2012 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese AP #10- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The AP #10 Spätlese from the Domprobst is a superb example of the vintage, with all of the purity and inherent elegance of the vintage very much in evidence on both the nose and palate. The excellent nose jumps from the glass in a mix of tangerine, white grape, clementines, gentle notes of petrol, plenty of slate and a nice topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and beautifully focused, with a superb core, ripe acids and superb backend, slaty minerality driving the very long and perfectly balanced finish. A beautiful wine in the making, and probably a Spätlese that will demand a few years of bottle age before it really starts to drink well. 2016-2035+. **93.**

**2012 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese AP #5- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The 2012 AP #5 Spätlese from the Domprobst is a brilliant wine in the making. The stunning bouquet is a blend of lime, orange, pink grapefruit, citrus peel, plenty of slate and a floral topnote redolent of lilac blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and an absolute mineral bath from the mid-palate back, with a great core of fruit, laser-like focus, snappy acids and great backend mineral drive on the very long and very refined finish. A simply magical bottle of young Spätlese! 2018-2045. **95.**

**2012 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese (Auction)- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The Auctions Spätlese from the Domprobst in 2012 is also destined for future greatness. The nose offers up a magical constellation of lime, orange, candied violets, very complex minerality, bee pollen and a whisper of petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch even more refined and complex than the AP #5, with superb mid-palate depth and intensity of flavor, flawless focus and balance and superb length and grip on the zesty and utterly dancing finish. This will probably start to close down by the time the auctions roll around in September, but if you happen to be in Trier, do not miss this utterly stunning wine, as it is probably one of the greatest young examples of Schaefer Spätlese I have ever had the pleasure to taste! 2020-2050. **96+.**

**2012 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese AP #4- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The AP #4 Himmelreich Auslese is one of those magical examples of the 2012 vintage that relies primarily on the “golden berries” of this great year, as Christophe Schaefer noted that “only about fifteen percent of the bunches included in this cuvée showed any signs of botrytis.” The wine is utterly classic on both the nose and palate, delivering a vibrant bouquet of apple, lime, pear, bee pollen, very complex minerality, candied violets and an exotic topnote of licorice. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and gloriously focused, with a lovely core, crisp acids and simply stunning length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. A great Auslese! 2018-2050. **94.**

**2012 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese AP #11- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

Of the three Domprobst Auslesen in the cellar this year, the AP #11 is the one that only includes a tiny percentage of botrytized berries. It is a young, utterly classic and very, very promising young Auslese, soaring from the glass in a beautiful mélange of lime, orange, a touch of petrol, a profound base of slate, lavender and a topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and racy, with a rock solid core of fruit, huge mineral drive from the mid-palate back, snappy acids and utterly brilliant length and grip on the focused and amazingly pure finish. A magical wine in the making. 2020-2060+. **95.**

**2012 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese AP #9- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The AP #9 Himmelreich Auslese from Christophe Schaefer is another absolutely beautiful young bottle in the making and a completely different iteration of the *terroir* of

Himmelreich than AP #4, as this one is translated through the prism of a very clean and elegant glazing of botrytis. The gently botrytized bouquet offers up a beautiful blend of peach, tangerine, a touch of honey, lovely minerality, candied violets and a bright topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and absolutely dancing, with a lovely core, zesty acidity, great focus and complexity and a very long, poised and vibrant finish that closes with a distinct note of Himmelreich minerality. Just a glorious bottle of Auslese! 2020-2060. **95.**

**2012 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese AP #14- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The 2012 Domprobst Auslese AP #14 is yet another beautifully elegant and gently glazed bottle that shows off the beauty of very clean botrytis on these golden berries. The stunning bouquet soars from the glass in a mix of orange, white peach, gentle notes of honey, a fine base of slate and a floral topnote redolent of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and ethereal, with bottomless depth, lovely mineral drive and a very, very long, zesty and utterly classic finish. The purity and nascent complexity here are simply brilliant. 2020-2060+. **95.**

**2012 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese (Auction)- Weingut Willi Schaefer**

The Auction Auslese this year from the Domprobst is the most exquisitely refined of these three gently-glazed Auslesen and it is clearly a legend in the making. The magical nose offers up a very complex and vibrant mélange of clementine, lime, peach, honey, kaleidoscopic minerality, orange blossoms, lime zest and candied violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and absolutely bottomless at the core, with outstanding focus and balance, wonderful complexity and a very, very long and light on its feet finish that seamlessly weaves pure botrytis, stunningly ripe and clean fruit and gloriously complex minerality. Pure magic. 2020-2060+. **97.**

**Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm (Wehlen)**

*This was my first, very long overdue visit to Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm and I was delighted to taste a full range of 2011ers and various other examples from earlier vintages. We were graciously welcomed by Dr. Katarina Prüm, who I had promised I would visit on my next trip to the middle Mosel when we had chatted at the auctions in Trier. I do not know why it took me such an egregiously long time to finally visit the estate, as I have been drinking and cellaring the wines from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm since my very earliest wine drinking days and have always loved these wines. I was very happy to see that the 2011ers were really showing beautifully at the time of my visit, and there were various other treats pulled out from other relatively recent vintages to augment the fine range of the 2011ers here. Dr. Prüm noted that the 2012ers here had just recently been assembled and had their sulfurs adjusted at that time, so it was not an opportune time to taste through the vintage, but I hope to have a chance to report on the 2012ers here on my next visit to the estate- which will not be very long in the future! The last couple of Auslesen we tasted at the end of our tasting had no labels, so I can report on their AP numbers. One of the things that struck me very much on this first visit was how the sulfur levels in all of these wines seemed quite typical for German wines of their respective ages, as when I often taste young wines from this estate here in the US, they seem to be quite a bit more blocked by youthful SO<sub>2</sub> than was the case with any of these wines. I have to assume that this has something to do with how these quite reductively produced wines adapt to travel across the ocean to the states, where it will often take several years for the wines to settle back in and really start to show the detail and complexity that was so evident in each and every one of these wines at the estate on this visit. It is not really of material interest, as the wines from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm have always been built to age a long, long time, and I never have any inclination to open any of my*

*younger wines in the cellar from this estate and generally do not even consider opening a bottle of the family's lovely wines until they have had at least fifteen years of bottle age. But, the difference was quite striking and I thought might at least merit a comment, as I enjoyed this entire range far more than I anticipated in terms of how expressive the young wines were showing- given the fact that if we replicated the exact same lineup here in the US, the wines certainly would have been quite a bit more grumpy about being opened up so soon!*

## **2011ers**

### **2011 Estate Riesling Kabinett AP #6- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

The 2011 Estate Riesling Trocken is a very pretty wine, offering up a complex and fairly open nose of pear, apple, slate, spring flowers and a nice touch of vanilla bean (no doubt owing to some Wehlener Sonnenuhr in the blend). On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with lovely focus, a very nice core, zesty acidity and excellent length and grip on the classy finish. I would give this lovely wine a year or two to develop some of its secondary layers of complexity. This is an excellent value. 2014-2025+. **90.**

### **2011 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett AP #9- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

I have really loved the Himmelreich examples I have tasted from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm that I have tasted over the years and this 2011 Kabinett is going to be excellent. The pure and youthful nose jumps from the glass in a mix of green apple, lime, a complex base of slate, petrol and a vibrant topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and very primary, with a superb core of fruit, excellent focus and balance, great cut and a very long, filigreed and zesty finish. This will need a fair bit of bottle age to really blossom, but it will be exceptional. 2018-2035+. **93+.**

### **2011 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett AP #8- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

The 2011 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett AP #8 from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is a gorgeous and very expressive example of the vintage. The deep, pure and utterly refined nose wafts from the glass in a blend of delicious apple, pear, a beautifully complex signature of slate, petrol and a potpourri of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and rock solid at the core, with zesty acids, laser-like focus and simply stunning length and grip on the complex and dancing finish. A stunning Kabinett in the making! 2021-2050. **95.**

### **2011 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #12- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

The 2011 Himmelreich Spätlese AP #12 is another excellent expression of this magical *terroir*. The bouquet is a very refined and youthful blend of pear, tangerine, slate, a touch of petrol, orange blossoms and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and nascently complex, with lovely focus and core, a suave attack and absolutely superb backend cut and vibrancy on the perfectly balanced and very, very long and snappy finish. A wonderful young wine. 2020-2060. **93+.**

### **2011 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #28- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

The 2011 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #28 from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is a great, great wine in the making. The very youthful and primary nose offers up a sophisticated mélange of pear, white peach, a deep and very complex base of slate, a touch of vanilla custard, bee pollen and apple blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very youthful, with a great core of fruit, beautiful balance and delineation, crisp acids and stunning grip on the very, very long and classy finish. Just a gorgeous bottle of Spätlese in the making- but, give it time! 2025-2075. **95.**

### ***Older Vintages***

#### **2010 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #9- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

The 2010 vintage presented some absolutely stunning possibilities in terms of ripeness and acidity combinations, and the 2010 Himmelreich Spätlese AP #9 from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is one of those magical combinations. The deep, young and brilliant delivers a vibrant constellation of apple, white peach, petrol, a great signature of slate, orange zest, wild yeasts and a gentle topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and extremely racy, with a rock solid core of fruit, startling precision and detail, impeccable balance and amazing length and grip on the electric finish. One of the best young examples of Spätlese I have had the pleasure to taste in many a year! 2025-2075. **96.**

#### **2009 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #27- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

The 2009 Graacher Himmelreich Spätlese AP #27 from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is a stunning wine in the making, soaring from the glass in a very classy aromatic mélange of tangerine, lime, wild yeasts, very complex minerality, bee pollen and incipient notes of petrol. On the palate the wine is medium-full, young and very pure, with laser-like focus, racy acids and simply brilliant length and grip on the dancing and still very youthful finish. A glorious expression of the Himmelreich! 2025-2075. **94.**

#### **2008 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Spätlese AP #8- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

The 2008 Badstube Spätlese AP #8 is a really lovely wine that is beginning to drink very well indeed and is now quite wide open and approachable. The suave and refined nose wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, white peach, tangerine, bee pollen, a gentle base of slate and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and filigreed, with a creamy core of fruit, ripe, crisp acids and very fine length and grip on the poised and nicely focused finish. Lovely juice. 2013-2035+. **92.**

#### **2008 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #2- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

The 2008 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #2 from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is a bit less evolved than the very pretty Badstube from this vintage, but it too is a fine bottle in the making. The deep and still fairly youthful bouquet delivers scents of apple, tangerine, a touch of rather Domprobst-like slate, lime zest, petrol and a nice touch of top-end smokiness from wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and nicely reserved, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance and a very long, classy finish that closes with fine cut and grip. A lovely wine that still needs five or six years to really start to hit on all cylinders. 2019-2050. **92+.**

#### **2008 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #4- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

Not surprisingly, it is still very early days for the glorious 2008 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese AP #4, but this is going to be one stunning bottle of Spätlese at its apogee! The very youthful nose jumps from the glass in a superb blend of pear, lemon blossoms, slate, vanilla bean, hints of petrol, bee pollen and delicious apples. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very intensely flavored, with a rock solid core, snappy acids and outstanding length and grip on the poised, youthful and very, very classy finish. A great wine, but still many years away from really drinking at its apogee. 2023-2060. **95.**

#### **2007 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #24- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

The 2007 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese AP #24 from Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm is a beautiful wine that is blossoming very nicely at age six and is only a few years away from really starting to drink at its apogee. The complex and very classy nose offers up scents of apple, white cherries, a gentle dollop of wild yeasts, spring flowers and a bit of vanilla bean in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and very elegant, with a good core, lovely



filigree, bright acids and very good length and grip on the suave and refined finish. A lovely wine. 2017-2045. **92.**

**2004 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #25- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

The 2004 Spätlese AP #25 from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr is a superb wine that is beginning to stir and start to stretch its wings for a long and refined life of primetime drinking. The superb bouquet offers up a complex blend of delicious apples, wild yeasts, lime blossoms, a fine base of slate, gentle notes of petrol, a bit of mossiness and a nice topnote of ripe peach. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and zesty, with excellent mid-palate depth, ripe, snappy acids and superb focus and grip on the well-balanced and classy finish. A beautiful wine. 2013-2035+. **94+.**

**2004 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

We only tasted two Auslesen on this vintage, but both were excellent. The 2004 version from the Sonnenuhr offers up a classy, very pure and beautifully clean bouquet of pineapple, white peach, vanilla custard, slate, a touch of wild yeasts and a fine topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still quite youthfully reserved, with an excellent core, bright acids and a very long, still primary and racy finish. Whereas the 2004 Spätlese AP #25 is really starting to drink well at age nine, it is still very early days for this excellent Auslese. 2020-2060+. **94.**

**2003 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm**

I had some very fine examples of the 2003 German vintage on this trip and the '03 Prüm Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese was one of the best. The deep, ripe and complex nose offers up a very stylish bouquet of pineapple, pear, orange zest, honeycomb, slate and a nice touch of Chartreuse-like botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and just starting to blossom with secondary elements, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance and a long, quite crisp (particularly for a 2003er) finish. A lovely, lovely wine that is drinking very well already, but has decades of life still ahead of it! 2013-2035+. **94.**

**Weingut Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch (Bernkastel)**

*Sofia Thanisch-Spier and her Cellar Master, Olaf Kaufmann, have teamed up to produce a superb range of wines in 2012, and there are several examples in the portfolio that are destined to be very long-lived cellar treasures in the decades to come- led naturally by some absolutely stunning young bottlings from the Doctor vineyard. The very clean style of the 2012 vintage and the very favoured nature of the estate's vineyard holdings seem to have been made for this other this year and the quality up and down the Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch range is truly lovely, with the QbA Trocken and Estate Riesling bottlings particularly strong and representing excellent values. My only hesitation with recommending these lower level bottlings is that they will all be bottled under screwcap, which the estate's clientele have been demanding for several vintages with these lower level, but high quality wines, and it seems a shame to me that in a vintage with such outstanding potential for aging that these fine QbA bottlings will not have at least a small percentage bottled under cork for those of us crazy enough to want to cellar our QbA bottles for an extended period of time. Keep in mind that the wines here at the "Estate Riesling" level also include all of the estate's production from their small parcels in Graacher Domprobst and Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr, so there are some absolutely exemplary raw materials in these bottlings and their potential for cellaring should be self-evident. But, presently, these wines should probably be drunk up in their earlier days, due to their closures, but, at least they will be absolutely delicious out of the blocks and it will not be much of a*

*sacrifice to have to drink them in the bloom of youth! The beautiful Indian Summer on the Mosel in 2012 allowed the estate to pick each block at optimal ripeness and select for specific Prädikat levels, and a sharp frost on the evening of December 13<sup>th</sup> also made it possible to produce a rare Eiswein bottling from the Doctor vineyard this year (and what a stunning Eiswein it is!) in addition to the customary strong range of Kabinett, Spätlese and Auslese from this fabled terroir. The 2012 is a great, great success for this historical estate and I cannot recommend the entire range strongly enough!*

**2012 Estate Riesling QbA Trocken- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch (screwcap)**

The 2012 Estate Riesling Trocken had only been bottled the week before my visit, but was still showing very well indeed. This is a beautifully structured wine that would age well if sealed under cork, but I understand from Frau Thanisch that the vast majority of this is drunk up by the estate's clients within a few months of purchase and it is the clients' desire for this wine to be under SC that drives the domaine to bottle it thusly. The nose is deep and quite fine in its blend of green apple, lemon, salty soil tones, slate and a nice topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and minerally, with a good core, crisp acids and very good length and grip on the focused finish. 2013-2025. **87+**.

**2012 Dr. Thanisch Riesling Kabinett- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch**

The Estate Riesling Kabinett is actually a Feinherb bottling (this designation will appear on the back label for markets outside of Germany) and was still in barrel at the time of my visit. This is a very fine bottle in the making, delivering a youthfully complex bouquet of apple, a touch of grapefruit, wild yeasts, a fine base of slate and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and quite dry in profile, with a fine core and very good length and grip on the bouncy finish. I assume that this will also be bottled under SC, but my notes do not indicate this for certain. 2013-2025+. **88**.

**2012 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Kabinett Feinherb- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch**

The 2012 Badstube Kabinett Feinherb is a very pretty wine in the making and a step up from the above in terms of detail and complexity. The very refined and impressively complex nose wafts from the glass in a mix of tart orange, green apple, sea salt, a lovely underpinning of minerality, petrol, gentle notes of wild yeasts and just a whisper of laurel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and beautifully balanced, with a very good core, bright acids and a long, focused and complex finish. This is a lovely wine in the making that will really blossom nicely with a year or two of bottle age. 2014-2030. **90**.

**2012 Estate Riesling QbA- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch (screwcap)**

Having had the good fortune to taste some of the basic Estate Riesling QbA from Weingut Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch with significant bottle age, I can speak to just how well this bottling evolves with bottle age, and it seems such a pity that it is now all bottled under screwcap. This was still in barrel at the time of my visit and the 2012 version is going to be a lovely wine, as it offers up a complex aromatic blend of apple, tangerine, salty slate soil tones, white flowers, lime zest and a touch of lilac blossom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and juicy, with lovely mid-palate depth, fine focus and very good grip on the long and perfectly balanced finish. This is a serious QbA in the making. Good juice that I would love to have in my own cellar-under natural cork! 2013-2025+. **90**.

**2012 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Kabinett- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch (screwcap?)**

The 2012 Badstube Kabinett was still in cask awaiting bottling, and I imagine that this will eventually be bottled up under screwcap as well- as it has been in the last few vintages. The

bouquet is deep and youthfully complex, offering up scents of apple, pear, petrol, slate, wild yeasts, lime peel and violets. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a fine core of fruit, bright, zesty acids, beautiful balance and a very long, focused and classy finish. This is fine juice that shows just how strong the 2012 vintage was for wines at this Prädikat level. Hopefully, at least part of the cuvée will be bottled up under natural corks, as this has the bones to age for several decades! 2015-2035+. **90+**.

**2012 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Kabinett- Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch**

The 2012 Doctor Kabinett had been bottled the week before my visit, but had not yet shut down and was really showing beautifully. The deep, pure and utterly classic nose offers up scents of pear, apple, violets, petrol, a beautiful base of slate and a vibrant topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with lovely filigree and focus, impeccable balance and a very long, complex and classic finish. This is just a quintessential vintage of young Doctor Kabinett! 2018-2050. **94**.

**2012 Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Spätlese - Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch**

The 2012 Bernkasteler Badstube Spätlese is excellent this year, with fairly broad shoulders, but a lovely synthesis of generous Bernkastel fruit and a strong vein of minerality giving the wine lift and depth. The superb nose wafts from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, lime blossoms, bee pollen, slate and incipient notes of petrol. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and bright, with a good core, fine focus and complexity, ripe acids and lovely length and grip on the succulent and bouncy finish. This is really tasty and will drink well right out of the blocks, but it has the requisite structure to also age very well indeed. Lovely juice. 2013-2035. **92**.

**2012 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Spätlese - Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch**

The 2012 Berncasteler Doctor Spätlese was bottled at the same time as the Kabinett, but was showing extremely well at the time of my visit. As is customary at the estate, two-thirds of this cuvée are bottled together, with one-third reserved to make a second bottling that will be made available at the auction in Trier in September. I have never asked how the differentiation is made in the cellars as to how the two cuvées are decided upon, but based on how well the “regular” Doctor Spätlese was showing, I cannot wait to taste the auction version in Trier. The wine offers up a reserved and utterly classic nose of pear, lime, petrol, a superb base of minerality, violets, lime zest and a nice touch of bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and impressively light on its feet, with a lovely core, bright acids and excellent mineral drive on the long and focused finish. A superb vintage for the Doctor Spätlese. 2018-2040+. **94+**.

**2012 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Auslese - Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch**

The 2012 Doctor Auslese is a magical wine in the making, soaring from the glass in a brilliant blend of yellow plum, white cherries, pears, honeycomb, violets, a beautiful base of slate, incipient notes of the *fleur de sel* and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and racy, with a rock solid core of fruit, superb balance, great bounce and lightness of step and a very, very long, nascently complex and utterly seamless finish. This is a great, great young Doctor Auslese, but it will want close to a decade’s worth of bottle age to really start to blossom and reveal all of its secondary and tertiary layers of complexity. It should prove to be very long-lived and dazzling at its apogee. 2022-2065. **95**.

**2012 Berncasteler Doctor Riesling Eiswein - Wwe. Dr. Thanisch Erben Thanisch**

The 2012 Doctor Eiswein was harvested on December 13<sup>th</sup> and comes in around 200 Oechsle. It is an absolutely brilliant wine. The gorgeous and still very youthful nose delivers a magical constellation of apple pie, pineapple, lovely minerality, honey and lime zest. On the

palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with excellent complexity and focus, racy acids, a rock solid core and stunning length and grip on the electric finish. A glorious bottle of Eiswein that will drink well from early on and should prove to be almost timeless as well. 2013-2050+. 97+.



### **Weingut Schloss Lieser (Lieser)**

*Thomas Haag and his Cellar Master, Phillip Vesper, have been on quite a hot streak in the last several years and their 2012ers are again, amongst the most magical wines to be found anywhere in Germany in this exceptional vintage! We spent much of our visit with Thomas Haag this time talking German football, as Herr Haag is a great fan of Bayern Munich and I was travelling with two of the biggest fans of this football club that I have ever met, so I was in the midst of a serious tutorial on the team's prospects and roster iterations this year (and as I finish this article, Bayern Munich has moved onto the Champion's League final, after thoroughly thrashing the superb team from Barcelona in the semi-finals- witness my having paid attention during my visit to Schloss Lieser!), so though I did not take a lot of notes on things such as picking dates or yields at Schloss Lieser, I had a great time talking football with some serious fans and tasting some absolutely stunning young bottles of Riesling! The Niederberg Helden vineyard in Lieser seems to be particularly adroit at capturing botrytis in its microclimate, and though there is a relative dearth of glazed wines from botrytis to be found in the 2012 vintage in general, there are two really lovely, nobly rotten bottlings (a Goldkapsel and a Lange Goldkapsel) from the Helden in the 2012ers from Schloss Lieser that will be absolute must buys for those who love botrytized higher Prädikat wines and who are likely to be less enamored of*

*the very clean, “golden berry” style of Auslese that is featured in so many of the estates that I visited on this trip. The entire lineup of 2012ers from Schloss Lieser are impeccably well-made and exhilarating at their respective levels of ripeness and quality, and this is very clearly one of the greatest estates in Germany today.*

**2012 Schloss Lieser Riesling QbA Trocken- Schloss Lieser (screwcap)**

The 2012 Estate Riesling Trocken is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a stylish nose of pear, lime peel, wild yeasts, petrol and a lovely base of slate. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and racy, with a fine core of fruit and a long, focused and classy finish. This is a very, very good bottle of basic dry Riesling. 2013-2025. **89.**

**2012 Lieser Riesling Spätlese Trocken- Schloss Lieser**

The Estate Riesling Spätlese Trocken is an absolutely superb wine in 2012 and happily, this wine will be bottled up under natural cork. The bouquet is a vibrant and complex blend of lime, grapefruit, a gorgeous base of slate, petrol and wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and elegant, with a great core of fruit, excellent cut and focus and a very, very long, intense and nascently complex finish. The wine’s alcohol this year is 12.5 percent, which makes it rock solid at the core and yet still very light on its feet. Great juice. 2013-2030+. **93.**

**2012 Schloss Lieser Riesling QbA Feinherb- Schloss Lieser (screwcap)**

The 2012 Estate Riesling Feinherb is another very strong basic bottling in this vintage, coming in with alcohol in the 10-10.5 percent range (final analyses were not yet done on the wines) and around twenty grams per liter of residual sugar. The very classy nose wafts from the glass in a mix of tart orange, petrol, wild yeasts, lovely minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and complex, with a very soil-driven personality, fine focus, quite moderate sweetness (as the combination of lovely minerality and superb acids really gobbles up the perception of sugar in the wine) and lovely length and grip on the classy finish. This is a delicious wine- pity it will be bottled under screwcap. 2013-2025. **89.**

**2012 Schloss Lieser Riesling Kabinett - Schloss Lieser (screwcap)**

The 2012 Estate Kabinett had just been bottled two days prior to my visit and seemed to my palate to have a rather metallic impression of minerality, but maybe that was just my imagination because of its ignoble closure. In any case, this is a very pretty wine under the screw, offering up scents of apple, white cherry, slate, spring flowers and that aforementioned touch of heavy metal. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, fine focus and a long, crisp and zesty finish. The score assumes that the metallic shadow is simply a passing phenomenon from having just been bottled, and that at least in its early days, the wine will resume a much more classic expression of slate minerality. There is no question that the raw materials here are excellent and the wine would have been delightful under cork. 2013-2020. **90.**

**2012 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Kabinett- Schloss Lieser**

The 2012 Brauneberger Juffer Kabinett from Schloss Lieser is an absolutely stunning young Kabinett, with great complexity and filigree. The absolutely lovely nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of lime, white cherries, wild yeasts, a very complex base of slate, lime blossoms and a nice touch of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and beautifully filigreed, with a lovely core, bright acids and superb cut and mineral drive on the focused and very long finish. Just a beautiful bottle in the making. 2016-2035. **93.**

**2012 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Spätlese- Schloss Lieser**

The 2012 Helden Spätlese is extremely elegant this year, taking advantage of the inherent refinement of the vintage. The beautiful nose jumps from the glass in a blend of white cherries, apple blossoms, a lovely underpinning of slate, a touch of petrol, bee pollen and violets. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and extremely classy, with a great core of fruit, dancing acidity, laser-like focus and superb length and grip on the complex and utterly classy finish. A beautiful bottle of Spätlese. 2013-2035+. **94.**

**2012 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese- Schloss Lieser**

The 2012 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Spätlese is every bit as refined and complex as the Helden, jumping from the glass in a blend of lime zest, white cherries, a touch of pear, complex, slatey minerality, a gentle touch of wild yeasts and a lovely, floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full, crisp and complex, with a very strikingly mineral profile, lovely purity on the attack, a rock solid core and beautiful length and grip on the snappy and complex finish. Another absolutely stunning Spätlese. 2016-2040. **94.**

**2012 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Auslese- Schloss Lieser**

The regular Helden Auslese in 2012 shows very little or no botrytis and is a classic “golden berry” example of its Prädikat. The very refined and classy nose wafts from the glass in a mix of white cherries, pears, bee pollen, slate, a nice touch of *fleur de sel*, and a floral topnote redolent of both lime blossoms and violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and beautifully balanced, with great focus and core, crisp acids and simply superb length and grip on the transparent and utterly refined finish. This is a classic bottle of Auslese that will live for decades and drink gloriously after only a few years of bottle age. Great juice! 2018-2045+. **94+.**

**2012 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel- Schloss Lieser**

The 2012 Goldkapsel from the Helden shows a lovely glaze of very clean botrytis, but with this quality much more evident on the creamy palate than it is on the very pure nose. The bouquet is a beautiful blend of lime, white cherries, a touch of fresh mint, gentle honey tones, slate and candied violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and dancing, with lovely creaminess on the attack, a fine core and a superb backend that is driven both by zesty acidity and a pronounced minerality. The finish is very, very long, focused and complex. Just a stunning wine. 2018-2050. **95+.**

**2012 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese Goldkapsel - Schloss Lieser**

The 2012 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese Goldkapsel from Schloss Lieser is another absolutely brilliant wine, with a very clean glaze of botrytis adding lift and precision with a gentle tropical drift. The gorgeous nose soars from the glass in a blaze of lime, white cherries, tangerine, slate minerality, honeycomb and candied violets. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and filigreed, with a fine core of fruit, great soil expression, nascent complexity and simply stunning length and grip on the zesty and supremely elegant finish. Another stunning wine! 2022-2060. **95+.**

**2012 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Auslese Lange Goldkapsel- Schloss Lieser**

The 2012 Long Gold Kap from the Helden is a very nicely botrytized example of the vintage, with the wine offering up a nobly rotten mélange of honey, yellow plums, oranges, a lovely base of slate minerality, candied violets and lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and honeyed, with great freshness and nascent complexity, a fine spine of minerality, snappy acids and outstanding length and grip on the very long finish. This wine is very, very light on its feet for its fairly substantial glazing of botrytis and is a gorgeous bottle in the making. 2022-2060. **94.**



### **Weingut Reinhold Haart (Piesport)**

*In Piesport, there were two nights of frost on October 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>, and Johannes Haart commented that almost all of their picking occurred after these two very cold evenings. Yields here were quite low in 2012, but Herr Haart was very happy with the quality of the berries that were brought in (both before and after the frosts) and the only soft spot of the 2012 vintage in his view is the quantity of wine that will be available. He reported that there was very, very little botrytis in Piesport and its environs in 2012, and most of the higher Prädikat wines were made from the vintage's golden berries, rather than from grapes with any signs of noble rot. As is often the case when I visit here in late March, the final decisions on blending were just being made, so I did not have the opportunity to taste the full range of wines that will be offered by Weingut Haart in 2012, as a few of the cuvées had just been decided upon and blended, with their sulfurs adjusted at the same time and were not really on form for tasting. Johannes Haart, jokingly served all the samples from screwcapped bottles this year- knowing well my fondness for this closure- but, afterwards chuckled and said that this was just for ease of transferring the samples from the casks to the tasting room and they were not a sign that the number of bottles produced under screwcap was going to expand in the years to come here! He observed that he and his father were very much under the impression that the wines do not age anywhere near as well under screwcap as they do under cork, but if their clients insist on the wines being bottled under screwcap, it is not really appropriate for them to insist on the wines being sealed with natural corks. This is of course within certain limits of pedigree for the wines, as Johannes thinks that the lower level wines, which are going to be drunk up quite young in any case are not too bad to drink out of screwcap, but he would never take higher Prädikat wines and close them with screwcaps, as these are wines that are meant to be aged for a long time. There are only two Kabinetten in the cellars this year- one each from the Gräfenberg and the Goldtröpfchen, and there will be a couple of different Spätlesen from the Goldtröpfchen as well (though I only had a chance to taste one of the two, as the final blend for the second one was not yet decided upon).*

### **2012 Kreuz Riesling Trocken- Weingut Reinhold Haart**

The 2012 Kreuz Riesling Trocken is a very nice, quite dry wine in the making, with a residual sugar of only three grams per liter. It hails all from grey slate soils, but those which are softer and which are fairly deep, to give the wine a bit of generosity at its very low level of residual sweetness. The bouquet offers up a lovely nose of peach, wild yeasts, a beautiful base of slate and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, bone-dry finish. Good juice that will want a couple of years in the cellar to really blossom. 2015-2030+. **88+**.

### **2012 Goldtröpfchen Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Reinhold Haart**

The 2012 Goldtröpfchen Grosses Gewächs came in at thirteen percent alcohol in this vintage and is a superb wine in the making. The fermentation has just finished up at the time of my visit and the wine was still a touch unsettled on the palate, but its inherent quality was very plain to see. The nose is a deep and complex blend of pink grapefruit, apple, wild yeasts, slate, petrol and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite young structurally, with a fine core of fruit, ripe acids and fine focus and grip on the long and beautifully balanced finish. This will be lovely. 2016-2035. **92**.

### **2012 Piesporter Gräfenberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Reinhold Haart**

The Gräfenberg is all red slate soils and this was one of the few wines in the cellar that was made from grapes brought in prior to the frosts at the end of October. It is a lovely wine,

with Spätlesen must weights and nine percent alcohol. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of peach, apple, a fine base of slate, wild yeasts, apple blossoms and just a whisper of vanilla custard. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and snappy, with lovely depth in the mid-palate, excellent complexity and a very long, bright and well-balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2013-2030+. **92+**.

**2012 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Reinhold Haart**

The 2012 Goldtröpfchen Kabinett is another lovely wine in the making, with a beautiful synthesis of the depth and generosity of this vineyard and the cut and elegance of the vintage. The nose is young and very promising, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of peach, tangerine, petrol, slate, apple blossoms and a lovely topnote of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerful for a Kabinett, with a fine core of fruit, crisp acids and a very long, focused and zesty finish. Fine juice in the more broad-shouldered style of the Goldtröpfchen. 2016-2035. **92+**.

**2012 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Reinhold Haart**

The 2012 Goldtröpfchen Spätlese that I had a chance to taste on this trip was lovely, offering up a superb nose of peach, apple, petrol, a beautifully complex base of slate, esthery notes of bee pollen and a potpourri of fruit blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and complex, with a fine core, crisp acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and youthful finish. I really love the balance and constituent components here and this will be a superb bottle, but it will want three or four years of bottle age to really start to blossom and hit on all cylinders. 2016-2035. **92+**.

**2012 Wintricher Oligsberg Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Reinhold Haart**

The 2012 Oligsberg Spätlese is a lovely counterpoint to the Goldtröpfchen Spätlese from this vintage, as it does not possess quite the same depth and muscle of the latter wine, but offers up a bit more early perfume and even finer filigree. The very lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of peach, pear, a touch of tangerine, a lovely base of slate, just a whisper of honey and a delicate topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very racy, with a fine core, zesty acidity and fine length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. A beautiful wine in the making. 2015-2035. **93**.

**2012 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Auslese- Weingut Reinhold Haart**

The 2012 Goldtröpfchen Auslese is a classic example of the vintage, with very, very little botrytis and the great purity of a predominance of golden berries. The gorgeous and utterly refined nose offers up a superb constellation of peach, oranges, honeycomb, a bit of vanilla custard, gentle slate undertones and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely gorgeous in terms of balance and focus, with a rock solid core, ripe acids and outstanding length and grip on the youthful and very pure finish. Great juice. 2018-2040. **94**.

***Ruwer***

**Weingut Karthäuserhof (Christophe Tyrell)**

*Weingut Karthäuserhof was one of the few estates in Germany that I visited on this trip to opt to pick earlier, rather than later, and they have made some very pretty wines, but have perhaps missed an opportunity to really make brilliant examples of the 2012 vintage as a result of their having picked on the early side. Christian Vogt, who has been the Keller Meister here for several vintages has now been promoted to Director of the estate, as the long-time proprietor, Christian Tyrell has now retired and sold off his interest in the property to his cousins- who*

*happen to live full-time in New York and will leave the day to day management of this great old estate in the very able hands of Herr Vogt. Herr Tyrell had been in charge of this great estate since 1986 and during his tenure, the quality of the wines has always been exemplary and one expects that this will continue apace with the new ownership organization. One has to wonder if the decision to pick a bit earlier than the neighbors here was the result of the ongoing transference of ownership at the time. In any case, the 2012ers from Weingut Karthäuserhof are very good wines, with the harvest having started on October 1<sup>st</sup> this year and having been completed before any of the frosts hit the Ruwer during the third week of the month. Yields were very low here- only thirty hectoliters per hectare- which was a bit less than what the estate had to deal with in the draconian vintage of 2010. The entire cellar had been bottled only two weeks prior to my visit and may not have been on its best behavior as a result, so please keep this in mind and consider my scores to be baselines for the wines- which may well prove to be even better when they have had some time to recover from their bottling. I have been a big fan of what Christian Vogt has accomplished at this estate since his arrival here and have every reason to believe that the quality of this great property will continue on undiminished under the new owners.*

#### **2012 Ruwer Riesling Trocken- Weingut Karthäuserhof**

The basic estate Riesling Trocken from Karthäuserhof is a very pretty wine in 2012, offering up a stylish nose of grapefruit, white cherries, a generous dollop of petrol, citrus peel and a fine underpinning of slate. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a good core and fine cut and grip on the wide open and tasty finish. 2013-2020+. **88.**

#### **2012 Schieferkristall Riesling Trocken- Weingut Karthäuserhof (screwcap)**

The 2012 Schieferkristall Riesling Trocken is a very lithe and tasty bottle, tipping the scales at 10.5 percent alcohol and offering up lovely complexity and bounce. I hope it survives its choice of closure, as it would be a pity to see such a pretty wine lost to reduction under the screw. The stylish and youthful nose offers up scents of white cherries, grapefruit, tart orange, salty minerality and a touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very mineral in personality, with a fine core and a long, focused and tensile finish. 2016-2035. **90.**

#### **2012 Alte Reben Riesling Spätlese Trocken- Weingut Karthäuserhof**

The 2012 Alte Reben Riesling Spätlese Trocken from Weingut Karthäuserhof is a pretty easy-going wine that seems to have lost just a touch of grip and snap from de-acidification this year (though I am only speculating that this wine was de-acidified). The bouquet is a youthful mélange of pear, grapefruit, wild yeasts, cherry pit, petrol and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and nascently complex, with good mid-palate depth, but a slightly gentle backend. The length is still good here, but I would love to have seen a bit more cut, as the depth and complexity are admirable. 2015-2035. **89.**

#### **2012 Tyrell's Edition Riesling Spätlese Trocken- Weingut Karthäuserhof**

As I noted last year,, this is a new bottling from Karthäuserhof to fill the gap in the quality hierarchy between the Alte Reben and the Grosses Gewächs (think of it as the premier cru in the dry Riesling lineup here) and the 2012 is very fine indeed and a notable step up from the Alte Reben bottling in this vintage. The very fine nose offers up scents of pink grapefruit, caraway seed, a beautifully complex base of slate, petrol and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core, crisp

acidity and excellent focus and grip on the very long and classy finish. Fine juice. 2016-2035+. **92.**

**2012 Karthäuserhofberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs- Weingut Karthäuserhof**

The 2012 Grosses Gewächs - or the Trocken wine that is likely to be bottled as such, as of course, it is still “officially” too early to be tasting GG wines and this is only what Herr Vogt suspects may be the GG bottling ☺ is excellent, with a very cool profile from its twelve percent alcohol and lovely focus and balance. The superb and youthful bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of grapefruit, bread fruit, tart orange, crystalline minerality, lemongrass, petrol and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, fine focus and great length and grip on the racy and beautifully balanced finish. Fine, fine juice in the making. 2018-2040. **93+.**

**2012 Schieferkristall Riesling Feinherb- Weingut Karthäuserhof (screwcap)**

The 2012 Schieferkristall Riesling Feinherb is a very pretty wine that I would have loved to have seen bottled under cork, but that was not its fate. The stylish nose delivers a very pretty blend of pink grapefruit, white flowers, a touch of pear, a fine base of slate and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and mineral-driven, with a sound core, lovely acids and a long and bouncy finish. With twenty grams per liter of residual sugar, this wine weaves a seamless tapestry of fruit, mineral and acidity without any rough edges and will drink very well from the outset. 2013-2025. **88.**

**2012 Eitelsbacher Karthäuserhofberg Riesling Kabinett- Weingut Karthäuserhof**

The 2012 Eitelsbacher Karthäuserhofberg Kabinett is a very pretty example of the vintage, delivering a bouquet of white cherries, tangerine, apple blossoms and a very stylish base of minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and light on its feet, with a good core, fine complexity and a long, crisp and wide open finish. Good juice. 2013-2030. **90.**

**2012 Eitelsbacher Karthäuserhofberg Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Karthäuserhof**

In 2012, the Karthäuserhofberg Riesling Spätlese is a very succulent and tasty example of the vintage that is quite a bit more forward than some other estates’ top Spätlesen. The lovely nose jumps from the glass in a mix of white cherries, pears, lilacs, bee pollen, slate and just a whisper of petrol. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and juicy on the attack, with lovely focus and bounce, but really pretty gentle cut and grip on the long finish. This will drink very well from the outset and is balanced enough to age gracefully, but I would have loved to have seen a bit more snap on the backend. 2013-2030. **91.**

**2012 Eitelsbacher Karthäuserhofberg Riesling Auslese- Weingut Karthäuserhof**

The 2012 Auslese from Weingut Karthäuserhof is excellent and seems very much to be a very gently-botrytized example that took equal advantage of the golden berries of the vintage. The deep, pure and utterly superb nose wafts from the glass in a blend of white cherries, pears, a touch of pineapple, bee pollen, slate and a pungent topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and vibrant, with a lovely core and filigree, bright acids and excellent focus and balance on the long and succulent finish. This will not need an extended period of bottle age to blossom and should really start to drink well with only a few years of bottle age, but it will also age long and gracefully. 2016-2040. **94.**

**Weingut Maximin Grünhäuser (Mertesdorf)**

*Dr. Karl von Schubert was kind enough to open up several of the upper Prädikat wines from 2011 (that had not been ready to show last spring) alongside their 2012 counterparts this year, which always makes for a very intriguing comparison of the two most recent vintages. In*

*addition, we were treated to a mini-vertical of the first four vintages of the Pinot Blanc that has been planted in the Herrenberg and the first vintage of the new Pinot Noir that is planted in the heart of the Abtsberg vineyard, so this was a very rounded and varied tasting in late March. 2012 looks to be a very, very strong vintage for this great estate, as the style of the vintage seems to dovetail beautifully with what I love best about the wines from Maximin Grünhäuser, and several of the 2012ers here at the upper Prädikat levels reminded me quite strongly of the large selection of 1988ers from this estate that I still have in very good depth in my own cellar. Yields were very low here in 2012, averaging thirty-five hectoliters per hectare, which no doubt has contributed to the excellent quality of so many of the bottlings here. There was some early botrytis here that was used for a number of excellent, “numbered fuder” Auslesen this year, and overall, the quality of the range of wines is the strongest here in several vintages. There is even an Eiswein from the Abtsberg in 2012 that was harvested after a freeze on December 12<sup>th</sup>, which was still bubbling away in the cellars at the time of my visit.*



*My only reservation with the direction of the estate these days is that the infernal screwcap continues to make deeper and deeper inroads into the lineup of wines here- for example, seventy percent of the beautiful 2012 Abtsberg Kabinett will be bottled under the screw this year- a total waste of the wine in my opinion for those who might like to age the wine beyond eighteen months or so after the bottling. Since I just enjoyed a brilliant bottle of '94 Abtsberg Kabinett a few months ago- which was just starting to blossom and really come into its own- I*

*have a hard time warming up to the idea of taking a wine of such pedigree and track record for long aging and sticking it under a screwcap! Additionally, the classic Maximin Grünhäuser style of wild yeast fermentation and relatively reductive winemaking in these great old wood fuders seems a particularly bad match for the highly-reductive nature of screwcaps, and indeed, a few of the very young bottles we tasted under screwcap here were already showing the first signs of reduction and that inimitable “metallic minerality” brought (in my opinion) to the wine world by the Alcoa Corporation. Dr. von Schubert is a very strong proponent of screwcaps- citing experiments that were done with various bottlings back in his days at the university and whose wines have aged brilliantly by his account as a strong endorsement for the closure, and it seems likely that if the present trend continues, one will someday see all of the Maximin Grünhäuser wines’ fates sealed under screwcaps. This predilection at the estate has certainly stopped me from buying several of the bottlings from the estate for my own personal cellar in recent vintages and I mourn the fact that several wines that I would love to have in my cellar from 2012 are going to be bottled exclusively under SC and will be of no use to me. (As I mentioned in the vintage introduction, all scores and projected windows of drinkability below evaluate the wine as if it were destined to evolve properly under its selected closure, as much like premature oxidation issues, I can see no real way to extrapolate a current wine’s showing to take into account potential issues of permanent reduction under SC.)*

*The other big change at this historical estate in recent years of course has been the planting of Pinot Blanc and Pinot Noir, and I was very intrigued to taste four vintages of the Pinot Blanc and the first Pinot Noir vintage to be released (the 2011er) during this visit. The wines were quite good (the Pinot Noir was particularly impressive for being such young vine version and showing such fine qualities), but I do wonder if they are a worthy trade for Rieslings made from these parcels in the Herrenberg and Abtsberg. I fully understand that the decision to plant different varieties in these two vineyards was to broaden the range of wines produced at the estate, and I assume that there is a fair backlog of older vintages of Riesling here that have still not sold through the pipeline and which made the decision to branch out a bit easier. However, as good as these two bottlings are, they are just two more examples of Pinot Blanc and Pinot Noir competing on an international stage with a huge number of similar wines from dozens of different countries, and they do not seem likely to really distinguish themselves from the pack in the same way that the magical Rieslings from these two great vineyards have done for centuries. To be fair, it is still very early days and it may be that these wines will really start to stand out more as the vines become older and the cellar team becomes more accustomed to working with these parcels planted to different grapes, but will they ever really stand at the summits of their respective varietal camps in the same way that a great Riesling from either the Herrenberg and Abtsberg have done so often in the past? It seems to me that if the Rieslings were not selling through in past vintages, it would behoove the estate to find more representatives to sell their wines around the globe, rather than grub up filet sections of the Abtsberg and Herrenberg and plant varietals that are going to have a tougher time with international competition in the market than the beautiful Rieslings produced here have done over their long and illustrious history. Just my two cents- but, it seems to me that if your importers are not doing the job, you find more or different importers.*



## **2012ers**

### **2012 Maximin Grünhäuser Estate Riesling Trocken QbA (screwcap)**

The 2012 Estate Riesling Trocken was already showing a decided sharpness to its minerality from its bottling under screwcap. There are very good raw materials here- with a nose of lime, grapefruit, petrol, a touch of mossiness and the metallic minerality quite nice. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, sharp and piercing, with a strong indication that it will go reductive at the speed of light. Not really sure how to handicap this wine- perhaps it was just really sharp from its recent bottling under the screw? ???

### **2012 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Trocken- Alte Reben**

The 2012 Alte Reben from the Abtsberg was showing pretty well at the time of my visit, offering up a bouquet of grapefruit, green apple, lime peel, slate and petrol. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and quite mineral in personality, with fine focus, snappy acids, good, but not great depth at the core and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. My notes do not indicate if this wine is going to be bottled under cork or SC. 2017-2030+. **88+**.

### **2012 Maximin Grünhäuser Estate Riesling Feinherb (screwcap)**

The 2012 Estate Riesling Feinherb was still a barrel sample, but was destined to be bottled under screwcap. The wine is a very lovely blend, as it carries seventeen grams per liter of residual sugar to balance the acids and minerality and is really a very lovely wine out of barrel. The classy bouquet offers up scents of lime, green apple, slate minerality, a nice dollop of wild yeasts, a bit of mossiness and a vibrant topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a fine core, racy acids and a nice touch of residual sweetness softening the snappy finish. I love the balance and complexity of this wine today and wonder how much of this will survive its closure of choice. 2015-2030+. **90**.

### **2012 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Superior**

I have been very impressed with the quality and style of the “Superior” bottlings from both the Abtsberg and Herrenberg since the estate began to offer them a handful of vintages ago, and the 2012 Abtsberg Superior is another lovely wine. The deep and classy nose offers up a constellation of white cherries, lime, Chartreuse-like herb tones, a beautiful base of slate, petrol and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and quite generous on the attack, with lovely mid-palate depth, very good focus and balance and lovely backend cut and mineral drive on the long finish. This is a classy wine that really will do very well at the table. Impressive juice. 2015-2030. **92**.

### **2012 Maximin Grünhäuser Bruderberg Riesling QbA (screwcap)**

I have had so many beautiful Bruderberg QbA bottlings over the years with a fair bit of bottle age on them (just tasted the 1993 while in Munich on this trip!), that it pains me to think that this beautiful 2012 Bruderberg QbA is destined to live out a short and stormy life bottled exclusively under screwcap. This was still a barrel sample at the time of my visit and showed off lovely potential, wafting from the glass in a mix of lime, fresh mint, white cherries, petrol, herb tones, a lovely base of slate and a topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and classy, with a fine core, lovely mineral drive and excellent length and grip on the crisp and complex finish. This is really an exceptional young vintage of the Bruderberg QbA and it cries out for a long and natural evolution under cork- but in vain! 2013-2035+. **91+**.

### **2012 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett (screwcap)**

The 2012 Herrenberg Kabinett had already been bottled under SC at the time of my visit. The nose is lovely and quite complex, offering up scents of green apple, white cherries, smoke, mossy overtones, a fine base of slate, gentle notes of petrol and a topnote of violets. On the

palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and quite complex out of the blocks, but already showing the first vestiges of piercing sharpness from its closure and I would be willing to bet the farm that this wine goes reductive within twelve months! The finish today is long and focused and this was clearly a great wine in cask- how it will perform under SC is anyone's guess, but I have my doubts. 2013-2030. **90.**

**2012 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Kabinett (70%- screwcap)**

This is really a lovely vintage of Abtsberg Kabinett and it will be well worth a special effort to seek out the thirty percent of this cuvée that are to be bottled with natural corks. The lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of white cherries, pears, lime zest, a beautiful base of slate, petrol and a nice touch of violets again in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and classy, with a fine core, impressive nascent complexity, fine focus and balance and a very long, snappy and quite minerally finish. Fine juice in the making. 2016-2040. **92+.**

**2012 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Spätlese**

While I did not taste a Herrenberg Spätlese this year, I did have a chance to sample the Abtsberg Spätlese from 2012 and it is absolutely lovely. Dr. von Schubert explained that there will only be a single bottling of Abtsberg Spätlese this year, as the very low yields made it logical to only produce one bottling. This is an excellent wine, offering up a deep and very classic bouquet of apple, lime, white cherry, kaleidoscopic minerality, wild yeasts and a lovely floral topnote redolent of lilacs. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and very pure, with a fine core, snappy acids, laser-like focus and a lovely tensile quality to the finish from the great expression of minerality in this wine. This is a beautiful, very youthful and utterly classic wine in the making. 2018-2045+. **93.**

**2012 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Auslese**

The regular Abtsberg Auslese was produced entirely from golden berries in 2012 and is really a lovely example of the vintage. The superb and very pure nose offers up scents of lime, pear, slate minerality, bee pollen, a gentle whisper of petrol and a topnote of lilacs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and nicely cool and reserved on the attack, with a fine core (though not quite as deep as the Abtsberg Spätlese), fine expression of minerality and a very long, zesty and beautifully balanced finish. A very lovely Auslese that will age very well indeed. 2020-2060. **92+.**

**2012 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Auslese Fuder 25**

A bit of frost in October concentrated the grapes here, rather than botrytis, and the wine is really a stunning example of the vintage that shows just a whisper of Eiswein character from the frosts. The brilliant nose soars from the glass in a blaze of white cherries, pear, lime zest, violets, bee pollen, lovely slate undertones and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very racy, with a great core of fruit, laser-like focus and a very, very long, poised and refined finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Auslese in the making! 2020-2060. **94+.**

**2012 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Auslese Fuder 83**

The 2012 Abtsberg Auslese Fuder 83 is a beautiful wine in the making, with perhaps a very clean glazing of botrytis added here to the perfectly ripe, golden berries of this vintage to produce a very pure and scintillating example of the vintage. The beautiful nose offers up scents of pear, white cherries, lime blossoms, a very complex base of slate, violets and a dollop of honey. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and creamy on the attack, with a rock

solid core, great focus and grip, snappy acids and beautiful complexity on the very, very long and dancing finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Auslese as well! 2016-2045. **94.**

**2012 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Auslese Fuder 84**

The Fuder 84 Abtsberg Auslese from 2012 is more clearly glazed with botrytis than Fuder 83 and is also a bit more primary at the present time. The deep and honeyed nose wafts from the glass in a fine mélange of white cherries, tangerine, pear, a nice dollop of slate, plenty of honey tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and still a tad youthfully unformed, with a fine core, very good acidity and grip and a very long, pure and primary finish. This still needs time to unfold and really show its full character, but the potential here is clearly very good. 2020-2060. **93-94.**

**2012 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Auslese Fuder 87**

The 2012 Abtsberg Auslese Fuder 87 is also a very young and unevolved wine, but it seems to show just a bit more complexity and breed than the Fuder 84 that preceded it in the lineup. The youthful nose offers up a deep and classy mixture of pear, fresh fig, white cherries, honeycomb, lime blossoms, slate and a gentle touch of mossiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and youthful, with a creamy texture, lovely mid-palate depth, bright acids and fine focus on the very long, nascently complex and very classy finish. This will be a lovely Auslesen with sufficient bottle age and just may end up being the very best of what is truly a stunning range of Auslesen here in 2012! 2020-2060. **93-95+.**

**2011ers**

**2011 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Auslese**

The 2011 Herrenberg “regular” Auslese is a very pretty wine that will drink well with just a few more years of bottle age and should age quite gracefully as well. The stylish nose offers up scents of pear, lime, honey, mossy overtones, a bit of white cherry and a floral topnote redolent of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite silky on the attack, with lovely complexity, rather gentle acids and beautiful balance on the long and classy finish. This is a very pretty wine that comes across as just a touch gentle in structure after several of these 2012ers. 2017-2040. **90.**

**2011 Maximin Grünhäuser Herrenberg Riesling Auslese Fuder 15**

The 2011 Herrenberg Auslese Fuder 15 is a superb wine in the making and again a wine that will not demand any extended cellaring time to deliver a lot of pleasure. The deep and very classy nose soars from the glass in a blend of white cherries, Herrenberg herb tones, honeycomb, lime peel, a beautiful base of slate, a touch of cress and incipient notes of petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very suave, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance and a very long, complex finish that closes with outstanding mineral drive. A superb wine. 2015-2045+. **93.**

**2011 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Auslese Fuder 25**

The 2011 Abtsberg Auslese Fuder 25 is also a lovely wine, with a more gentle and open-knit structure than the Herrenberg Auslese Fuder 15, but also with impeccable balance that will allow it to age long and gracefully. The lovely and very floral bouquet delivers a mix of white cherries, pears, violets, slate, honey, lilacs, bee pollen, orange zest and just a whisper of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure, long and succulent, with fine mid-palate depth, sound, framing acidity and excellent length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. A very pretty and laid back example of the Abtsberg. 2015-2040. **93.**

### ***Weissburgunder and Spätburgunder***

#### **2008 Grünhäuser Weissburgunder**

I did not write down the alcohol levels on these four vintages of Weissburgunder, but I would guess that are all in the thirteen percent range and the 2008 is probably the highest of the four. The wine offers up a pretty bouquet of apple, pear, a touch of pineapple, a hint of soil and a nice touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a touch hot on the backend, with good focus and a long, youthful and ripe finish. This is really not bad at all, though I would have loved to have seen it with a touch lower octane. 2013-2020+. **87.**

#### **2009 Grünhäuser Weissburgunder**

The 2009 Grünhäuser Weissburgunder shows a touch more ripeness on the nose, but is a touch cooler in the mouth than the 2008 version. The nose is a stylish blend of melon, apple, acacia blossoms, stony minerality, a touch of papaya and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, juicy and ripe, with a good core, crisp acids and a long, bright and youthful finish. Good juice. 2015-2025. **88.**

#### **2010 Grünhäuser Weissburgunder**

The 2010 Grünhäuser Weissburgunder was my favorite of this mini-vertical, as it offers up a very precise and classy nose of apple, pineapple, citrus blossoms, lovely minerality and just a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and still a bit youthfully marked by its new oak, with a good core, crisp acids and a long, still quite primary finish. This will need a couple of years in the cellar to both blossom and fully integrated its new wood. A very well-made Pinot Blanc. 2015-2025. **88+.**

#### **2011 Grünhäuser Weissburgunder**

Not surprisingly, the 2011 Grünhäuser Weissburgunder is more marked by its new oak, as it has had a year less in bottle to start to integrate this component. The nose is a blend of apple, pineapple, wheat toast, minerals and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and still quite primary, with a good core and good length and grip on the slightly woody finish. There is no doubt that there is plenty of stuffing to absorb the oak here with a bit of bottle age and this will be a tasty wine once it has fully integrated its wood. 2016-2025. **87.**

#### **2011 Grünhäuser Spätburgunder**

2011 will be the first commercial release of the Pinot Noir from this estate, as the short crop in 2010 did not make a commercially viable quantity and the wine will be kept in the family reserve at the estate. This wine has turned out quite well indeed, as it was produced from low yields of only eighteen hectoliters per hectare and came in at an even thirteen percent alcohol. The wine was raised in twenty-five percent new oak (two barrels out of eight), and the parcel in the Abtsberg has been planted with a fifty-fifty split of German and Burgundian clones. The bouquet is deep and quite classy in its mélange of black cherries, plum, raw cocoa, slate, woodsmoke and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and tangy, with a nice core, tangy acids, and a long, moderately tannic finish that still shows a bit of wood tannin in need of absorption. This is really quite fine- if one can divorce one's self from the concept that there is a bit less Abtsberg Riesling to go around these days due to the planting of Pinot Noir in the vineyard! An impressive first release. 2018-2035+. **89+.**

### ***Older Grünhäuser Wines Tasted During the Trip***

#### **2003 Maximin Grünhäuser Abtsberg Riesling Spätlese AP #29**

I always avail myself of the opportunity to taste older vintages from this estate when I am in Germany (there are also plenty of examples in my own cellar!) and this lovely 2003

Abtsberg Spätlese was chilled and ready for my arrival in Munich on my first day of the trip (*vielen dank* Florian!) and was drinking beautifully. The bouquet is a very pretty and esthery blend of pear, lime zest, bee pollen, a touch of petrol, a lovely base of slate and a topnote of freshly-culled mint. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very suave on the attack, with a lovely core and complexity, fine, framing acids and a very long, silky finish. This will want drinking up in the next several years, but it is a lovely example of a very good vintage in Germany and particularly in the Saar and Ruwer. 2013-2020+? **90.**

## **Saar**

### **Weingut Egon Müller (Scharzhof)**

*The collection of 2012ers on display at Weingut Egon Müller were absolutely superb, but, not surprisingly, this is not the type of vintage that really gets Herr Müller excited, as the scant amount of botrytis means that the possibility did not exist to make a wide array of late harvest elixir- which are the wines that Herr Müller loves the most! I did taste one Eiswein from 2012 during my visit to the estate, and there was another one bubbling away down in the cellars still, but this is not a vintage for BA or TBA, so Herr Müller will probably be digging around in the cellar for some older vintages of these great dessert wines to bring along to the auction in Trier, come September. Fortunately, there have been some very generous and heavily botrytized vintages over the course of the last decade in the Saar, so one suspects that there are several cellar treasures down below the Scharzhof estate that have not yet seen the light of day and one or two of these are destined to dazzle attendees in Trier this autumn. The picking teams at Weingut Egon Müller got started collecting grapes on October 15<sup>th</sup> of this year, with some early selections used to make a simply stunning and gently botrytized Goldkapsel Auslese from the Scharzhofberg, and then the remainder of the grapes brought in under optimal conditions over the ensuing few weeks, with very little or no botrytis. I tasted two distinct cuvées of Scharzhofberger Kabinett from the 2012 vintage, with the second one likely to be made available at the auction in September. Yields were extremely low at the estate this year, as the temperamental flowering really took its toll on production levels here, but the quality of the grapes was very high according to Herr Müller and he is quite content with the style and quality of the range of wines he has produced in this vintage- if one discounts for the fact that he is most happy with a year that is plush with a cornucopia of different bottlings from Goldkapsel on up to BA and TBA! This is a lovely and very classic set of wines that look destined to age brilliantly and should prove to be absolute cellar treasures at their respective Prädikat levels for many, many decades.*

### **2012 Scharzhof Riesling QbA- Weingut Egon Müller**

The Scharzhof QbA from Egon Müller, year in and year out, is always one of my favorite wines at this level, and the 2012 is another fine effort. The fresh and classy nose offers up scents of lime, pear, petrol, complex base of slate and a lovely, floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and crisp, with good mid-palate depth, nascent complexity, lovely acids and just a touch of backend sweetness perking up the long and pure finish. Fine juice. 2016-2035. **88+.**

### **2012 Wiltinger Braune Kupp Riesling Kabinett- Le Gallais**

It has been a while since there was a Kabinett from the Le Gallais estate, and the 2012 is really a lovely wine in the making and a reminder that this *terroir* really does nicely at lower levels of ripeness as well. The superb bouquet offers up a complex and vibrant mélange of green

apple, petrol, a touch of cress, a beautiful base of slate and a topnote of candied violets. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with a fine core, bright acids, excellent focus and balance and a very long, nascently complex and zesty finish. A beautiful example of the vintage. 2016-2035+. **92+**.

**2012 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett AP #3- Weingut Egon Müller**

There are two 2012 Kabinetten from the Scharzhofberg this year, with the second one likely to be auctioned off in Trier in September. The AP #3 Kabinett is the regular bottling- if this term can be used for an Egon Müller in the first place- and it is a lovely wine in the making. The bouquet is a blend of white cherries, lime zest, lovely, youthful botanicals, a complex base of slate, plenty of petrol and a touch of lime peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and very transparent, with a fine core of fruit, crisp acids, superb focus and grip and a long, classy and still quite primary finish. This will be a lovely wine, but it will need some bottle age to really start to blossom. 2020-2045. **92+**.

**2012 Scharzhofberger Riesling Kabinett AP #4- Weingut Egon Müller**

As Egon Müller has produced some absolutely stunning Auction level Kabinetten in the past, I was very happy to hear that there will likely be another one available in the 2012 vintage. The 2012 Kabinett AP #4 wafts from the glass in a classy and quite reserved mix of white cherries, green apple, kaleidoscopic slate nuances, lilacs, petrol and a topnote of lilacs. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and extremely soil-driven, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent focus and balance, zesty acids and great length and grip on the very youthful finish. This is still quite primary and it may prove that I am underrating its potential a bit, as it is still pretty bound up behind its structural elements. I will look forward to re-tasting it in Trier. 2022-2050. **93+**.

**2012 Wiltinger Braune Kupp Riesling Spätlese- Le Gallais**

The 2012 Braune Kupp Spätlese is a very pretty wine that is also quite youthful and unevolved out of the blocks. The bouquet is a youthful mix of white cherry, bee pollen, white grape, slate, a touch of lime blossoms and a nice underpinning of almost salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and vibrant, with fine mid-palate depth, exquisite focus and balance and a very long, succulent and nascently complex finish. Fine juice. 2020-2050. **93**.

**2012 Scharzhofberger Riesling Spätlese- Weingut Egon Müller**

There may be more than one 2012 Scharzhofberger Spätlese in the cellars, but I did not take note if this was the case or not. The one that I did taste was absolutely superb, soaring from the glass in a superb and very complex bouquet of lime, green apple, white cherries, a touch of mossiness, a beautiful base of slate, petrol, bee pollen and violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and beautifully focused, with blossoming complexity, a rock solid core, snappy acids and excellent length and grip on the simply gorgeous finish. I know that Egon Müller's heart really lies with wines at higher Prädikat levels than Spätlese, but this is really a stunning bottle of wine in the making and I suspect that down the road, this wine is going to be a bit more cherished at the estate than it seems to be out of the blocks! 2022-2060. **95**.

**2012 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese AP #8- Weingut Egon Müller**

The 2012 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese AP #8 from Weingut Egon Müller is a beautifully pure example of the vintage that has been glazed with a gentle touch of botrytis. The gorgeous nose wafts from the glass in a constellation of pear, fresh fig, honeycomb, candied lime peel, lilacs and the Scharzhofberg's inimitable base of slate. On the palate the wine is very pure, focused and full-bodied, with great cut and filigree, superb mid-palate depth, bright, zesty acids



and great harmony and breed on the very, very long and still very primary finish. This will be a brilliant wine in the fullness of time. 2025-2075+. **94+**.

**2012 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #10- Weingut Egon Müller**

The 2012 Scharzhofberger Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #10 was made from the first few passes in the vineyards in mid-October and is the most botrytized wine in the estate's lineup this year, with a very pure and clean coating of botrytis adding depth, electricity and a gently tropical edge to both the nose and palate. The superb bouquet offers up a classic blend of white cherries, pear, lime blossoms, honeycomb, a lovely base of slate and petrol and topnotes of both lavender and lime zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and creamy on the attack, with a superb core, exceptional focus and nascent complexity, great acids and stunning length and grip on the focused and very, very refined finish. A glorious wine. 2022-2075. **96**.

**2012 Scharzhofberger Riesling Eiswein AP #11- Weingut Egon Müller**

The 2012 AP #11 Eiswein is a beautifully complex and dancing, lighter-styled Eiswein. The nose delivers a lovely combination of white cherries, candied lime blossoms, white grape, tangerine, a hint of apple pie spices and a lovely underpinning of slate. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and quite ethereal, with great cut and lift on the very, very long and classy finish. This is a truly superb wine in the making. 2017-2055+. **94+**.



*Looking down from the Scharzhofberg at Weingut Egon Müller on an early spring afternoon.*

## **Weingut Forstmeister Geltz-Zilliken (Saarburg)**

*Hanno and Dorothee Zilliken have fashioned an absolutely stunning lineup of 2012ers, with the wines exhibiting brilliant precision and nascent complexity. The two basic Trocken bottlings, AP numbers 15 and 14, were very slightly de-acidified this year, to make them more accessible out of the blocks (as they will be drunk almost immediately by most clients), but the remainder of the lineup was not adjusted and the wines are naturally snappy and tensile and built for the long-term. As we were talking a bit about the brilliant complexity of the mineral expression of the Rausch vineyard, Hanno Zilliken explained that “the Rausch is one of only two vineyards in all of Germany with its soil type- seventy percent blue slate and thirty percent volcanic soils- with the other being the Abtsberg of Maximin Grünhäuser, and this accounts for the great complexity in the soil expressions in the wines from these two vineyards.” 2012 is a terrific vintage again here for the dry wines, but it was the magical range of Kabinetten that really caught my attention during our tasting- not that they were the absolutely finest wines on display- but, the three bottlings are absolutely gorgeous examples of the new style of Kabinett we find today (with the new regulations about yields and with the new weather patterns in post-climate change Germany) and as a group, they may well be the strongest set of Kabinetten that I have ever tasted from a single vintage from Weingut Zilliken. This is not to say that the higher Prädikat wines here are also not very, very special in 2012- as of course, they are- but, if one has been hungering for a few great Kabinetten to put in the cellar (an increasingly rare species of German Riesling in this era of global warming), the three Zilliken Kabinetten are must buys in 2012! The entire range of Zilliken 2012ers are stunning successes and are great testament to the sheer brilliance of an estate that is currently at the very top of its game! There may still be a few more famous producers in Germany these days- but there are none superior in quality that Weingut Geltz-Zilliken and I would make a very concerted effort to buy every bottle of 2012er from this estate that I could possibly fit in my budget! It is fitting that the geographical arrangement of my notes in this article has the Zilliken wines listed last- as this is the place of honor and a very appropriate last word on the brilliance of the 2012 vintage in Germany.*

### **Dry Wines**

#### **2012 Zilliken Riesling Trocken AP #15- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

The 2012 Estate Riesling Trocken had been bottled two weeks prior to my visit, with the lion's share under screwcap, but fifty cases bottled under natural cork for the Zilliken's Italian importer, who did not want screwcaps. This sample was tasted from screwcap. The nose is quite lovely in its blend of grapefruit, a touch of white cherry, lime peel, plenty of slate and a dollop of petrol. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and vibrant, with a very mineral personality, ripe acids and lovely focus and grip on the long finish. Good juice and a very impressive basic Riesling Trocken! 2013-2025+. **89.**

#### **2012 Saarburger Riesling Trocken AP #14- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

The 2012 Saarburger Riesling Trocken is really a lovely wine, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of white cherries, tart orange, a complex base of slate undertones, gentle notes of petrol, incipient smokiness and a topnote of sea salts. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and very bright, with a lovely core, superb focus and fine length and grip on the zesty and really quite refined finish. This is a terrific wine and a great value! 2013-2025+. **90.**

#### **2012 Saarburger Riesling Trocken “Alte Reben” AP #13- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

The 2012 Alte Reben Trocken is a dynamite example of the vintage, coming in at twelve percent alcohol this year and really refined and precise on both the nose and palate. The very

classy nose is more reserved out of the blocks than the above two wines, offering up a lovely blend of tart orange, pink grapefruit, slate, sea salts, citrus zest and a very gentle topnote of petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, racy acids, laser-like focus and great backend minerality and cut. The finish is very long and nascently complex, and this wine will be absolutely superb once it has had five or six years in the cellar to really unwind and blossom. Great juice. 2019-2040. **92+**.

**2012 Rausch Grosses Gewächs AP #11- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

The 2012 Rausch Grosses Gewächs is a very worthy follow-up to the magical 2011 GG- which I think will probably go down as the greatest dry wine ever produced during Hanno Zilliken's long and illustrious career- as it is another very refined, pure and precise and bone-dry expression of the brilliant *terroir* of the Rausch vineyard. The 2012 GG comes in at a cool and racy 12.5 percent alcohol and is another legend in the making, soaring from the glass in a youthful mélange of grapefruit, lemon, wild yeasts, a beautiful base of slate minerality, incipient smokiness, orange zest and a hint of petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and seamless, with a great core of fruit, ripe acids, great focus and cut, and a very long, refined and quite youthful finish. While this is probably not quite in the same league as the magical 2011 version, it is another absolutely brilliant dry Riesling and another wine destined for legendary status. 2020-2060. **95**.

***Off-Dry Wines***

**2012 Zilliken Riesling Butterfly AP #11- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

The 2012 Butterfly bottling from the Zillikens is quite lovely this year, taking advantage of the elegance and inherent purity of this superb vintage. The nose is a very pretty blend of tangerine, white cherry, slate, spring flowers and a gentle topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and well-balanced, with a solid core, crisp acids and just a touch of backend sweetness balancing out the lovely, slaty finish. Good juice. 2013-2020. **88**.

**2012 Saarburger Riesling Feinherb AP #9- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

The 2012 Saarburger Feinherb is really a superb wine this year, wafting from the glass in a classy aromatic blend of lemon, white cherries, orange zest, refined minerality, incipient smokiness and a nice dollop of fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and filigreed, with excellent complexity, a fine core, ripe acids and excellent length and grip on the very, very elegant finish. I love the zesty, citric personality to this wine, which adds a great vibrancy and precision on the backend. A superb wine and a great bargain this year! 2017-2035. **91+**.

**2012 Rausch Diabas AP #8- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

The 2012 Rausch Diabas is absolutely fabulous, with beautiful balance of twelve percent alcohol and eighteen grams per liter of residual sugar. The absolutely superb nose jumps from the glass in a mix of white cherries, tangerine, salty slate minerality, gentle notes of petrol and a floral topnote redolent of lilacs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and really rock solid at the core, with superb cut and grip, laser-like focus and absolutely stunning length and grip on the pure and nascently complex finish. With the high perception of minerality of the Saar in general and the Rausch in particular, at eighteen grams per liter of residual sugar, the overall effect here is really of a quite dry wine and I have little doubt that this will seem completely dry by the time it reaches its apogee of peak drinkability. A great, great wine in the making. 2016-2050. **94+**.

### *Traditional, Noble Sweet Wines*

#### **2012 Zilliken Riesling QbA AP #7- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

The 2012 Zilliken Riesling QbA is a really lovely wine, offering up a pure and succulent nose of pineapple, lime, lovely minerality, a nice touch of wild yeasts and a gentle topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and juicy, with a very good core, lovely focus and nascent complexity, ripe acids and lovely bounce and grip on the long finish. This is really a lovely wine- I did not note if this would be bottled under screwcap or natural cork, but I will be praying it goes under natural cork, as it will age beautifully. It is a simply stunning value! 2013-2025+. **90.**

#### **2012 Saarburger Riesling Kabinett AP #6- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

As I noted last year, the 2012 Saarburger Kabinett all hails from fruit from the Rausch vineyard, though, of course, there is no mention of this on the label. This was very good in 2011, but it is absolutely brilliant in 2012, and if you thought last year's version was a bargain, wait until you get a hold of this stunning 2012 Kabinett! The dynamite nose soars from the glass in a blaze of lime, orange, a touch of white cherry, salty minerality, white flowers and a gentle touch of petrol. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and beautifully filigreed, with a fine core, seamless structure, ripe acids and stunning length and grip on the vibrant and complex finish. The 2012 Saarburger Kabinett is so flawlessly balanced that it will drink gloriously right from the start, but will have no difficulties keeping thirty years or more. I cannot emphasize enough what a steal this wine is in the 2012 vintage! 2013-2035+. **93.**

#### **2012 Bockstein Riesling Kabinett AP #5- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

The 2012 Bockstein Kabinett is simply brilliant and a wine that I will be trying to find and add to my own cellar! The brilliant nose offers up a supremely elegant mélange of sweet lemon, a touch of petrol, oranges, a discreet base of slate and a wonderfully floral upper register redolent of both citrus blossoms and lilacs. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and very suave on the attack, with a rock solid core, seamless beauty, exceptional focus and grip and a very, very long and dancing finish. Just a glorious bottle of Kabinett. 2017-2040. **94.**

#### **2012 Rausch Riesling Kabinett AP #4- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

After the stunning quality of the previous two Kabinetten, I was not really sure if the Rausch Kabinett was going to be able to keep pace, but my worries were unfounded and this is the most brilliant of the trio! The stunning nose soars from the glass in a constellation of tangerine, white cherries, kaleidoscopic slate minerality, lime blossoms, just a hint of the petrol to come and a vibrant topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and medium-full, with great cut and grip, laser-like focus, superb intensity at the core, wonderful complexity and a brilliantly long, filigreed and sparkling finish. Just a magical Kabinett. 2018-2040+. **96.**

#### **2012 Rausch Riesling Spätlese AP #3- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

There will be two different Spätlese from the Rausch this year, and the "regular" bottling of 2012 Rausch Spätlese is a great, great wine. The absolutely superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of white cherries, oranges, salty slate, violets, bee pollen, lemon zest, pineapple and lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and almost creamy on the attack, with a great core, lovely focus and cut, excellent, nascent complexity and snappy acids driving the very long and vibrant finish. This is stunning juice. 2018-2040. **94.**

#### **2012 Rausch Riesling Spätlese AP #2 (Auction Bottling)- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

And the 2012 Auction Spätlese from the Rausch this year? Pure magic! The bouquet is just as deep and complex and even more refined than the "regular" bottling, delivering a smorgasbord of fresh pineapple, lemon, clementines, kaleidoscopic minerality, candied violets,

orange zest and a faint whiff of savory tones redolent of the classic mossiness one often finds in the Herrenberg. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and utterly suave on the attack, with an electric backend, a great core, remarkable complexity and flawless balance on the seamless absolutely stunning finish. This is one of the greatest young examples of Spätlese I have ever had the pleasure to taste! 2020-2050. **98**.

**2012 Rausch Riesling Auslese AP #1- Weingut Geltz-Zilliken**

After all the fireworks here with the Kabinetten and Spätlesen, one's natural inclination is to expect a bit of a letdown with the sole Auslese in the cellar, but this wine is the finest of an absolutely stellar range of 2012ers from the Zillikens! The utterly brilliant bouquet offers up scents of lemon, pineapple, lime, crystalline, slate minerality, sea salts, bee pollen, orange blossoms and candied violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and sizzling, with a creamy attack, a rock solid core, laser-like focus, magical complexity and simply stunning backend mineral drive on the snappy, light on its feet and endless finish. I would judge that there is a very gentle glazing of absolutely pristine botrytis here to give this wine its tropical shadings, but a predominance of golden berries to provide such electrifying precision on the gem-like palate. An utterly profound wine! 2022-2075. **98+**.

## THE 2012 BORDEAUX VINTAGE



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## THE 2012 BORDEAUX VINTAGE: A VERY INCONSISTENT, BUT CLASSICALLY-PROPORTIONED YEAR



*Château Figeac basking in the sunshine of the early spring of 2012- this good weather did not last long!*

The difficult 2012 vintage in Bordeaux has turned out a surprising number of absolutely lovely wines, and there are ample opportunities in this year for lovers of classically-proportioned, elegant and suave examples of claret. Long gone are the power-monger wines of 2009 and 2010- happily in most cases- and 2012 has produced an array of much more traditionally-styled wines than either of these two over-hyped vintages. But, as is sadly so often the case these days, there have been plenty of *vignerons* on both sides of the Gironde in 2012 that could not accept the dictates of Mother Nature in this vintage and have sought to impose their own personal styles on the wines of 2012, despite the complete lack of appropriate raw materials from the harvest, and these folks have made a mess of this vintage with over-extraction and various other attempts to “pump up the volume” of the vintage and make wines in a more powerful mold *à la* 2009 or 2010. So while there are some absolutely stellar and classic clarets to be found in this vintage, it is also a horribly inconsistent year and the failures do indeed outnumber the successful wines in 2012. To be fair, not all of the misses this year can be attributed to the failure to adopt cellar techniques to the characteristics of the vintage, as Mother Nature through up more than an adequate number of obstacles to producing top flight wine

during the growing season, and for some of the less well-placed estates, there simply was not an opportunity to make a great wine in 2012. But, for those who have charge of the finest *terroirs* on the Gironde, the opportunity was there in 2012 to make something very special in a very classic mold. Some estates seized this opportunity and made brilliant, old school wines of stunning potential, while others sought to pull out all their winemaking tricks in a misplaced attempt to create something out of the vintage more reminiscent of the over the top wines of 2010. Needless to say, those who sought this path have generally failed miserably in this vintage.

2012 is a year where one can readily see which estates have winemaking teams at the tops of their games and which are a bit adrift when confronted with a more challenging vintage- which 2012 certainly was right from the outset. As one *vigneron* commented when asked about the challenges posed by the growing season of 2012: “we had a bit of everything bad- cold and rain during flowering, constant threats of mildew during the first half of the summer, drought and hydric stress during the latter half, and then rain and uneven ripeness to deal with at harvest time.” In fact, given the difficult characteristics of the growing season of 2012, it is easy to hypothesize that a generation ago in Bordeaux, the vintage would have been far more catastrophic. But, the abilities of many of the classed growths to be draconian in terms of selection, harness large harvesting teams to comb through the vineyards plot by plot to ensure grapes are taken at optimally ripe as possible, and new technologies such as optical sorters were all instrumental in helping craft such a large number of successful wines in 2012. However, as was the case, for instance in the 2008 vintage in both Bordeaux and Burgundy, it is the estates that have fully understood and embraced the style of the 2012 Bordeaux vintage who have made the finest wines, and the very best examples of 2012 are wines that are far more interesting to my palate than even the most successful wines of 2009 and 2010, and these best 2012s are wines that are by wide margin the most exciting “classically-styled” clarets to emerge from this region since the top wines from the lovely 2008 vintage. If the price is right- and with wines such as the lovely 2012s from estates such as Château Corbin in St. Émilion or Château Calon-Ségur in St. Estèphe, one will fully expect the prices to be very, very reasonable in the context of today’s Bordeaux market- the 2012 vintage will provide an excellent opportunity for lovers of old school, classic Bordeaux if the wines are selected with care.

The growing season of 2012 was a bit of a roller coaster, with spring getting off to an early and very warm start in late March and early April, but with the weather then turning very cool and rainy by the middle of that month and remaining so for most of the next two months. With the region having suffered severe droughts for the last two years, the rains of May and June were, at first, very welcome to replenish parched soils and water reserves, but as the soggy weather dragged on there were worries that the flowering would be adversely affected by the cool and rainy weather. This indeed did occur, with the *floraison* far from ideal, the more temperamental merlot having difficulties flowering under the cold, grey skies and on-again, off-again showers, and the cabernets also not doing particularly well, and yields were consequently cut back from the outset by the indifferent flowering period in early June. The uneven and inconsistent flowering would lead to uneven ripening in the vines later in the summer, and in many cases, this unevenness would never really be conquered in 2012. It was not until the third week of July that the rainy weather really moved away from the Gironde, with plenty of warm, dry and sunny weather arriving in the region and virtually not another drop of rain was to fall here until the third week of September, so the grapes out on the vines finally had a chance to get

going and ripen. In fact, August of 2012 was the hottest since 2003! However, due to the severe hydric stress of the past two vintages, the water reserves were not particularly robust in the soils, despite all of the rain of the previous two and a half months, and by the end of this sunny cycle in early September, some vines- particularly the younger ones with less developed root systems to seek out water- had shut down and maturity was again lagging. Some of the young vines, particularly in the drier, most gravelly soils of the Médoc, never had a chance to catch up and fully ripen and folks here had to be very careful with selection to ensure that only fully ripe bunches were used for the *grands vins*.

The lagging maturity was less evident on the Right Bank than on the Left Bank (and reportedly in the Graves as well, but with the powerbroker consultants running amok here these days, it was really hard to judge whether the commune had been favored in 2012 or not, as there are a lot of really poorly-made wines here today!), as the more clay-rich soils did a better job of retaining water reserves from the heavy and constant rains of the spring and early summer, so hydric stress was generally less prevalent on the Right Bank- at least for all but the youngest vines. Some estates- headed by the châteaux owned outright by the firm of J. P. Moueix, such as Trotanoy, Bélair-Monange, Lafleur-Pétrus and the like, decided to do a draconian green harvest in August to remove the bunches that were lagging a bit in maturity, but others were content in the warm weather of this month to wait and see if the crop could be all ripened- as yields were already going to be quite low due to the poor flowering of June. While the Moueix lineup is indeed stellar in 2012, it is not at all self-evident that such drastic measures were completely necessary this year. From mid-July until the latter half of September, it was extremely hot and dry, and in the more porous soils, hydric stress- which had been such a key factor in both 2010 and 2011- was again slowing down the maturation process of the bunches, as vines in many places shut down. Rain the week of September 25<sup>th</sup> got the vines functioning again, and in fact, this rain fell just as many Right Bank properties with more water-retentive soils were starting to consider picking their merlot, as the higher clay content of their soils had allowed their vines to continue photosynthesis during the previous two months of drought conditions. Most folks had to wait a week or so to let the effect of these rains pass, and then brought in healthy, very adequately ripe grapes, but with the threat of rot from the previous week's rains certainly nipping at their heels as they raced to bring in their merlot. Cabernet franc had not been quite so lucky on the Right Bank, as it ripens a bit later than merlot and it was not really as optimally ripe when the threat of rot started to force picking. Consequently, many Right Bank estates chose to be quite severe in their selection of cabernet franc lots to be included in their wines, and several wines have higher percentages of merlot in their *grands vins* than is typical.

On the Left Bank, the merlot had been less favored than was the case on the Right Bank, with the struggles of flowering and a bit more hydric stress during the drought stretch from mid-July until the last week of September causing a less than ideal crop, and many of the most successful wines on the Left Bank relied primarily on their cabernet sauvignon this year. However, the rains of September 20<sup>th</sup> ushered in a rather stormy *fin de saison* (rather than the customary fine, Indian summer weather that often arrives after the autumnal equinox here and can really help the final quality of a vintage) and rain and the specter of rot would be constant companions for the remainder of the later harvest on the Left Bank. The showers were intermittent during the first week or two of October, and really wet autumn weather arrived in earnest around October 16<sup>th</sup> and anyone still with grapes out on the vines from this point on was

going to be out of luck. Given that ripening had already been lagging on the Left Bank, due to poor flowering, cold and wet weather through the middle of July, and then hydric stress until the rains of the week of September 20<sup>th</sup> got the vines started again in earnest, it is not surprising that there are wide ranges of ripeness and success on the Left Bank in 2012. Warmer parcels certainly benefited on this side of the Gironde in this vintage, and there were clearly some beautifully ripened plots of vines to be found in 2012, but it is also quite uneven and there are plenty of wines that also smell and taste of inadequate ripeness. If Mother Nature had been a bit kinder at the end of the harvest, as was the case in 2008, where October was perfect right up until the end of the month, 2012 on the Left Bank might have been even more successful, but with plenty of rain (and the attendant threat of rot in the vineyards) during the month, it was a struggle for most *vignerons*. Sadly, this is most apparent in the cooler microclimates of the Cru Bourgeois estates, that had to hustle in the second and third weeks of October to bring in as much fruit as they could before the rot really got the upper hand on the crop, but who would have been thrilled to have had another week to ten days of sunshine to more fully ripen the bunches lagging in maturity.

If the capricious weather of 2012 had not been enough of a hurdle for the wines of this vintage, there was also the human factor in the cellar that caused another very important impediment to true success this year. The raw materials of this vintage- even the very finest that could be found at estates who were most strict in selection- were certainly not cut from the same cloth as the buxom and high octane vintages of 2009 or 2010, and the “cookie cutter” winemakers who seem to try and make wines from the same absurd recipe year in and year out were confronted with patently unsuitable raw materials in 2012 for their inflexible winemaking doctrines. Thus, the more modern school of Bordeaux- wines produced under the aegis of the famous consulting firms such as Michel Rolland’s or Stephan Derenoncourt’s- have really not turned out well in 2012, and with a few exceptions, this is a school of Bordeaux that I would be studiously avoiding in this vintage (even more so than usual). It is interesting, as the cooler climactic conditions and rainy *fin de saison* of 2012 put a damper on one of the most egregious excesses of the modern school’s winemaking formula- the urge to harvest extremely late to increase potential alcohol- was not possible in 2012, as had also been the case in 2008. And as in 2008, with Mother Nature forcing the consultants’ hands a bit, their wines in 2012 are less over the top and offensively high in alcohol than has been the case in the last three vintages. In theory, this should all be to the good for those of us who value a more classic style of claret, but for whatever reason, I did not find the 2012s from the modern school as well-made as they were as a group in 2008, with many of these more pumped up wines showing a distinct lack of mid-palate depth in 2012, and there were a lot of hollow and leaden wines to be found from the growing number of estates seeking higher Parker points and hiring one of these two firms to mess with their wines. The 2012s here from the modernists are mercifully far lower in alcohol and overall tannins than in the last three vintages, but most are dry-edged from the combination of new oak tannins and often incompletely ripe skin tannins, so the wines as a group offer as little pleasure or potential for positive evolution in bottle as their corresponding bottles from the more over the top recent vintages. But, at least they do not deliver a punch of mind-numbing alcohol to go along with their other un-pleasantries in the glass.

Needless to say, it is with the more classically-oriented estates that the finest red wines of the 2012 vintage are to be found, and there are indeed some absolutely stunning middleweights in the making at the top addresses in this vintage. While the year has in general produced more

forward wines of decidedly less tannic bite than the last three years, there are still plenty of tannins in both the successful and less successful wines of the vintage, and this will be a more medium-term vintage in terms of longevity than it will be a decidedly early-drinking year. Comparisons with 2008 seem apt for the 2012s, but the latter vintage is generally more tannic than the earlier one, lower in acidity and certainly a bit more concentrated. For the best wines of 2012, producers were often evoking comparisons with their estates' 2001s or 1985s- pretty good company- or on the Right Bank, there were even some recollections of the 1998s. So, as you can see, there are indeed some very serious and complete wines to be found amongst the best 2012s, despite the fairly large numbers of unsuccessful wines in this vintage! No one in Bordeaux who produced a great 2012 was willing to rank it ahead of their respective 2010 (not necessarily a view I would share, as I found several 2012s more impressive than their 2010 counterparts), those who have had the most success in 2012 rank their new wines ahead of their 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2011 vintages. Interestingly, for those intent on following the Bordeaux market, the reports from *négociants*, *courtiers* and estate owners indicate that warehouses in Bordeaux remain loaded up with unsold 2010s, while the 2008 and 2009 stocks have all sold through. One can read into this what they will, but I have to believe that the hype surrounding the 2010s will begin to cool off considerably as these wines evolve (or devolve) with bottle age, and it is not hard to imagine that down the road they will have as much appeal as the over-rated 2003s do today. I did note that a lot of estate owners were pouring their 2003s off at events during the week of *En Primeur*, indicative that these precariously-balanced and generally overripe wines are better off consumed now, rather than left to their own devices in the cellar.

So, what are the style of the best red wines of 2012? For the most part, they are wines of utterly classic claret structures and balances- reasonably full-bodied, but not powerful, with ripe, well-integrated tannins, good cores, lovely soil expressions, and a fine sense of purity and elegance. Several of the top estates in the vintage have termed the 2012s a "*Belle Surprise*", as they had no sense that the fruit that they painstakingly nurtured during the difficult growing season would actually turn out such lovely wines. In general, acidities tend to be on the low side in 2012- this is the Achilles' heel of several well-made, but less than exciting wines that come across as rather "flat" from their low acids- but the best wines are beautifully balanced and show sufficient structure to probably carry them thirty or forty years in bottle. Happily, it is a vintage of quite classic octane levels, with most wines topping out between 12.9 and 13.3 percent alcohol on the Left Bank, and alcohols a bit higher in a few sites on the more favored Right Bank, but nowhere near as dizzying as in the last few years. In fact, Lafite-Rothschild has probably made the most old school claret of the vintage, as the *grand vin* here came in at 12.6 percent alcohol! One would expect that most wines on the Left Bank were chapitalized a bit (I did not bother to ask at the estates I visited and this information is not provided on the technical sheets that accompany the wines at the Union des Grands Crus tastings), but for folks who have been craving and old-fashioned vintage in Bordeaux, there are a lot of 2012s that are going to really prove a welcome relief from the wines of the last three vintages.

Interestingly, 2012 is really not a stellar year for the First Growths and their three counterparts on the Right Bank (I consider here Ausone, Cheval Blanc and Pétrus as the Right Bank First Growths these days, as this was customarily the rankings of these wines in the recent past), with only really Cheval Blanc and Pétrus producing stellar examples of the vintage. On the Left Bank, Lafite-Rothschild is clearly the finest of the Firsts to my palate on this side of the

Gironde, but there are several other Left Bank wines, led by the likes of Ducru-Beaucaillou, Palmer and Pichon-Lalande that I find to be even more complete and stunning wines in this vintage. As one will see in the notes that follow, the other First Growths confronted the challenges of the vintage in varying manners and had different degrees of success, but 2012 is generally not a vintage that is going to be remembered for the quality of the First Growths in this year. But, beyond this small group of the most illustrious and pricy wines of Bordeaux, there are some absolutely stellar 2012s to be found in cellars where the teams fully understood the precepts of the vintage and embraced these parameters wholeheartedly, and while the vintage is far too inconsistent to be called a top year, there is little doubt that there are some brilliant wines to be found on both the Right and Left Banks this year for lovers of old school claret.

While all the discussion of the 2012 vintage in Bordeaux has focused on the red wines to this point, the dry white wines of 2012 have turned out very well indeed, and are probably a more homogenous group than the reds of this vintage. Overall, 2012 is the most successful vintage for the dry white wines here since 2007, with the wines offering up very pleasing brightness, bounce and complexity. They are not as classically structured or complete as the superb 2007s, but like the 2011 white Burgundies, they will offer up an immediate appeal that may be most welcome in this era of premature oxidation. In fact, I tasted a couple of 2007 dry whites that were already premixed on this trip, indicating that the plague that has affected these wines since the 1994 vintage continues unabated and lovers of dry white Bordeaux are well-served to take the same precautions as lovers of white Burgundy these days and plan on drinking their wines up over the first five to seven years after their release. For fans of the unique and often compelling sweet wines of the Sauternes region, the 2012 vintage was not one that will go down favorably in history, as it was an exceedingly difficult year for the *Sauternais* and several of the top estates, including Châteaux d'Yquem, Rieussec, Raymond-Lafon, de Fargues and Suduiraut deciding not to produce a *grand vin* in this vintage. The Sauternes producers faced the same difficult growing season as their red wine-producing neighbors, and essentially saw one wave of botrytis arrive early in the autumn (which most gathered as a first *tranche* through the vineyards in anticipation of making several more), and then witnessed nothing but rain and grey rot the rest of the way through. It is my distinct impression that the complexity of Sauternes is built up through multiple passes through the vineyards to harvest different parcels at different stages of botrytis concentration, and with only one real pass to work with this year, even those who made pretty good examples of the vintage have not produced wines with the customary complexity of their wines in top vintages.

*The following notes were gathered during my ten days here in early April of this year and are arranged by commune, and then alphabetically by the name of the estate within the subsection of each commune. The only exception for this is where an estate offers up a second or a third wine, in which case I have listed all of the wines from the same estate together in the slot where the "Grand Vin" would fall alphabetically in the communal section. So for example, where Château Latour would fall alphabetically in the Pauillac section, readers will find first their third label, "Pauillac" listed, then Les Forts de Latour, and finally Latour's note. This seemed like the most logical way to handle second and third wines offered by so many estates these days, so that folks could find the notes in a relatively simple fashion in the future. The communal sections are listed roughly from south to north, starting with Sauternes and Barsac, and then moving up to the Graves, then over to the Right Bank and finally to the Médoc. The one*



*exception to this quasi-geographical ordering of the tasting notes is that I have slotted tasting notes on the Cru Bourgeois wines first in the coverage, as these tend to be spread out over a fairly wide geographic range and it seemed appropriate to put many of them together at the outset- as these folks could use a bit more positive coverage for their wines and their continuing efforts to save their estates from a world-wide market that seems rather indifferent to the wines these days. While it is all wine and roses at the top Classed Growths on either side of the Gironde these days, these less famous producers are continuing to struggle to stay afloat and one hopes that the next few vintages will be kinder to them than was the difficult 2012 growing season.*



### ***Cru Bourgeois***

*I tasted a large number of Cru Bourgeois wines this year, as the Cru Bourgeois organization was kind enough to put together a very large tasting of their member estates for several journalists on the Saturday afternoon prior to the official start of the En Primeur week. It was a fascinating tasting and clearly there are some very good properties in the rank and file here, but the very difficult vintage characteristics of 2012 were really toughest on these estates. As was quite obvious, so many of the Cru Bourgeois producers were caught between inadequate ripeness, as most of their soils are decidedly cooler and ripen later than their more illustrious neighbors amongst the classed growths, and the autumnal rains that brought widespread incidence of rot in the vines. A great many of these producers were caught in the unenviable*



*position of having to bring in unevenly ripe grapes or lose the whole crop to the encroachment of rot and end of season rains, so it is far from surprising that there were so few outright successes amongst the wines that were assembled for our tasting. Rather than fill up pages with tons of notes on wines that were simply laid low by the capricious mood of Mother Nature this year in the Cru Bourgeois regions, I have limited my notes in this section to those estates that somehow managed to beat the odds and really produce a very good wine in such difficult conditions. For these folks on the Cru Bourgeois level who succeeded so well in 2012, it is really a heroic effort and they should be sought out by savvy Bordeaux lovers looking for great values in this vintage. That there were more successful wines at our Cru Bourgeois tasting than there were the following day at the Cercle de Rive Droite tasting (where the vintage conditions were far more favorable to these Right Bank estates) speaks volumes about the differences in mentality amongst the two groups of estates, as the Cercle de Rive Droite estates were primarily laid low in 2012 through the human error of slavish emulation of the winemaking formulae of the power consultants, whereas the Cru Bourgeois producers were simply screwed by the tumultuous end of season conditions in this vintage.*

### **2012 Château d'Agassac**

The 2012 d'Agassac is an excellent example of the vintage. The wine is a blend of fifty percent cabernet sauvignon, forty-seven percent merlot and three percent cabernet franc, with the merlot harvest on the early side on September 22<sup>nd</sup> and the cabernets all brought in around the first of October and sidestepping the potential issues of rain-induced rot in the vines. The excellent nose offers up a complex blend of cassis, black cherries, espresso, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and just a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant, with a lovely core of fruit, superb focus and fine length and grip on the suavely-tannic finish. This is a lovely wine in the making and one of the steals of the vintage! 2017-2035. **88.**

### **2012 Château Bellegrave de Poujeau**

I had never previously tasted any wines from Château Bellegrave de Poujeau, but this 2012 was quite lovely and I will be keeping an eye out for their wines in the future. The 2012 is comprised of a blend of fifty percent cabernet sauvignon, forty percent merlot and ten percent cabernet franc and offers up a lovely nose of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, tobacco leaf, a lovely base of soil and a fine topnote of fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full and a stylish middleweight in the making, with sound depth, moderate tannins and fine focus and balance on the classy finish. The wine is just a touch short, but there are enough fine constituent components here to make up for that. Good, serious juice for its level. 2017-2030+. **87.**

### **2012 Château Belle-Vue**

The 2012 Château Belle-Vue is another quite successful bottle from the ranks of the Cru Bourgeois in this vintage. The wine is made up of a blend of fifty percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty percent merlot and twenty percent petit verdot and offers up a lovely and quite pure bouquet of cassis, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and impressively soil-driven, with a sound core, moderate tannins and lovely focus and balance on the ever so slightly, short finish. There is an awful lot of good things going on here in the glass and while this is not a really powerful example of the 2012 vintage, this is really a lovely middleweight in the making. 2017-2030+. **87.**

### **2012 Château Bel-Orme Tronquoy de Lalande**

I did not take note of the *cépages* of the 2012 Château Bel-Orme Tronquoy de Lalande, but at least I did take note of its fine quality. The complex nose offers up scents of cassis, blackberries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and just a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, moderate, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the focused finish. This blossomed very nicely as it sat in the glass and should prove to be another excellent value in 2012. 2017-2035. **87.**

### **2012 Château Brillette**

The 2012 Château Brillette is not the most complex Cru Bourgeois out there in this vintage, but it is a very nicely balanced wine that should age quite well. The bouquet is a blend of cassis, black cherries, dark soil tones, a touch of chocolate and a very discreet base of new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and well-balanced, with solid depth, ripe tannins, nice, framing acids and quite good length and grip on the finish. Good juice, with plenty of stuffing and polish to offset its moderate complexity. 2016-2030. **85.**

### **2012 Château La Cardonne**

The 2012 Château La Cardonne is comprised of a blend of forty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, fifty percent merlot and five percent cabernet franc and is really a lovely example of the vintage. The deep and quite classy nose offers up scents of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and a nice touch of tobacco leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and quite complex, with moderate tannins and impressive length and grip for its level. This is a good, old-fashioned honest wine that will age well and really start to drink nicely with only a few years of bottle age. Superb value. 2016-2030. **87.**

### **2012 Château Cissac**

The 2012 Cissac is a lovely, old school bottle of claret in the making, with the wine made up of a blend of seventy percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-two percent merlot and eight percent petit verdot. The deep, classy and quite precise nose wafts from the glass in a mélange of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, a fine base of dark soil tones, a bit of tobacco leaf and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very nicely structured, with a fine core of fruit, chewy tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long and youthful finish. This will need five or six years to really blossom and should deliver some very fine drinking at a great price once it has reached its apogee. 2018-2035. **87.**

### **2012 Château Le Crock (St. Estèphe)**

The 2012 Château Le Crock is a very well-made wine and a fine value. The complex and classy nose offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, a touch of espresso, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and a bit of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chewy and quite long, with a good core, ripe, old school tannins and very good length and grip on the youthful finish. This is really quite good for its level and a fine value, but it will need a bit of bottle age to blossom. 2018-2030+. **86+.**

### **2012 Château Dutruch Grand Poujeaux**

The 2012 Château Dutruch Grand Poujeaux is a touch modern in style, but is well-made and is really a pretty good example of the vintage. The *cépages* is fifty percent cabernet sauvignon, forty-five percent merlot and five percent petit verdot. The bouquet is a blend of cassis, coffee bean, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush and easy-going on the attack, with a solid core, just a touch of tannin and sneaky length and grip on the focused finish. There are certainly more complex

examples of the vintage to be found in the Cru Bourgeois ranks this year, but this is really a pretty tasty wine that will drink well from a pretty young age. 2017-2025+. **85.**

#### **2012 Château Lamothe-Cissac**

The 2012 Château Lamothe-Cissac is another old school, fine example of the Cru Bourgeois level of claret. The wine is not overly complex, but poised, focused and quite classic in its honest interpretation of its *terroir*. The *cépages* is fifty-eight percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty-five percent merlot, five percent petit verdot and two percent cabernet franc this year. The lovely bouquet is a blend of dark berries, cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, tobacco leaf and just a whisper of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely reserved out of the blocks, with a fine core, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the classy finish. Good juice and another outstanding value! 2018-2035. **87.**

#### **2012 Château Larose-Trintaudon**

The 2012 Château Larose-Trintaudon is not a bad wine by any stretch of the imagination, but given how pleasurable some past vintages of this wine have been, I was expecting it to be at the very top of the Cru Bourgeois estates in this vintage. The wine is a blend of sixty percent cabernet sauvignon and forty percent merlot this year and offers up a good, workman-like nose of red and black cherries, tobacco leaf, a nice dollop of soil, gentle weedy tones and a bit of coffee bean in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and has a pretty good core, but is just a touch flat from low acids on the long and nascently complex finish. The grip here is not bad and the wine will offer some complexity with a bit of bottle age, but I would have loved to have seen it just a touch more vibrant. 2017-2030. **85.**

#### **2012 Château Lestage Simon**

I had never previously tasted any wines from Château Lestage Simon and I was very impressed with the high quality of their 2012 and will be on the watch for their wines in the future. The 2012 Lestage Simon is a made up of a blend of sixty-nine percent merlot, twenty-three percent cabernet sauvignon and eight percent cabernet franc and offers up a fine and impressively complex bouquet of cassis, black cherries, dark chocolate, tobacco leaf, a lovely base of soil and a touch of lead pencil in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and superbly balanced, with a lovely core, very good focus and balance, fine-grained tannins and impressive length and grip on the classy finish. This is high class juice and a terrific value! 2018-2035. **87+.**

#### **2012 Château Pomeys**

I had never tasted any previous vintages of Château Pomeys and I was fairly impressed with the quality of this wine in 2012. The *cépages* is a fifty-fifty blend of cabernet sauvignon and merlot and the wine offers up a pretty stylish nose of cassis, tobacco smoke, dark soil tones, dark berries and a bit of new wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, plump and well-balanced, with solid complexity and mid-palate depth, moderate tannins and pretty good length and grip on the focused finish. Not bad at all. 2017-2025+. **86.**

#### **2012 Château Vieux Robin**

The 2012 Château Vieux Robin is a fine, old school chewy and robust Cru Bourgeois bottling that should age nicely and really offer up good value for folks looking to put an inexpensive claret in the cellar for a handful of years and allow it to blossom. The blend this year is a mix of fifty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, forty percent merlot, three percent cabernet franc and two percent petit verdot. The wine offers up a promising bouquet of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, tobacco leaf, a touch of tariness and a gentle topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with the potential for good

complexity, a solid core of fruit and a long, chewy and quite robust finish. This will never be the most elegant rendition of claret, but it will certainly reward the patient with a complex and quite tasty glass of wine at maturity. 2018-2035. **86+**.

### ***Sauternes and Barsac***

*As I noted in the outset, 2012 was not an easy vintage for the Sauternais, who essentially had one good wave of botrytis early on and then were washed out by the “fin de saison” rains and really had very little work with after their first tranche through the vineyards in early October. Several of the most important estates decided not to produce a wine this year, though a couple of these (Raymond-Lafon and Suduiraut) did produce a second label in 2012. (I do not have a note this year on the second wine from Raymond-Lafon, as I was unaware that they had produced one and reacting to the news that there would be no “grand vin” produced here this year, I did not make a stop at the property to taste and missed the chance to see their second wine.) In essence, given how difficult the year was for producing sweet wines in Sauternes and Barsac, I was rather impressed with how well some of these wines have turned out. It is not a rich or overly complex vintage by any stretch of the imagination, and really, there are some pretty good wines available from 2012 that will merit some interest if their prices are correct. This is not to say that there are not perhaps more compellingly complete wines still in the pipeline from Sauternes and Barsac from previous vintages, but the widespread reports that the 2012 vintage here was a complete washout simply did not match the wines on display at the UGC event during En Primeur. This is not a great vintage for the Sauternais, but there are some quite successful, lighter-styled Sauternes to be found from 2012 and I would suggest that down the road, these wines are going to provide some surprisingly good drinking in their lighter styles. And one of the nicer aspects of this vintage is that most of the wines are quite forward in style and they will drink pretty well right out of the blocks and probably hit their peaks of maturity in three or four years, so they could be quite useful in protecting top flight vintages like 2005 or 2007 that could do with more bottle age.*

### **2012 Château Bastor-Lamontagne (Sauternes)**

The 2012 Château Bastor-Lamontagne is really a very pretty, high-toned example of the vintage. The wine offers up a vibrant bouquet of coconut, fresh pineapple, chalk, bee pollen and just a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and light on its feet, with good acids, sound depth and very nice length and grip on the bouncy finish. It is not overly complex, but is really quite well-made and a fine success for this vintage. 2013-2030+. **87.**

### **2012 Château Broustet (Barsac)**

The 2012 Château Broustet shows a rather idiosyncratic nose that seems almost Riesling-like in its mélange of apple, sweet grapefruit, a touch of honeycomb and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite simple, with sound depth, low acids and very little complexity or grip on the fairly flat finish. 2013-2030. **82.**

### **2012 Clos Haut-Peyraguey (Sauternes)**

The 2012 Clos Haut-Peyraguey shows a nice touch of botrytis, but also shows that the noble rot can concentrate both desirable and less than desirable elements in the wine, as there is just a touch of underripeness in evidence here as well. The bouquet is a blend of honeyed pineapples and pears, orange blossoms, citrus peel and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly simple, with sound acids and just a touch of backend bitterness. This is okay, but there is little doubt that the proprietors here would have loved to have had a few

more *tranches* to work with and which would have allowed them to be a bit more selective with their blend. Not bad. 2013-2030. **85.**

**2012 Château Coutet (Barsac)**

The 2012 Château Coutet is one of the best wines produced in the Sauternes region in this difficult vintage and an impressive effort in this tough year. The deep, complex and very classy nose wafts from the glass in an elegantly glazed blend of pineapple, mandarins, honeycomb, chalky soil tones, orange blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very refined, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a very long, bright and classy finish. This is truly exceptional- given how tough this vintage really was for the *Sauternais*. 2013-2035+. **90+.**



*Château Raymond-Lafon- one of the finest estates in Sauternes, who only produced their second label in 2012.*

**2012 Château Doisy-Daëne (Barsac)**

The 2012 Château Doisy-Daëne seems to have included a bit more sauvignon blanc in the blend this year (perhaps searching for a bit more complexity), but the wine has turned out quite well. The bouquet is a very pretty constellation of sweet grapefruit, tart orange, bee pollen, citrus oil and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really has lovely acidity for the vintage, with a good core, fine focus and bounce and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. A very fine result for such a difficult vintage! 2013-2035+. **88.**

**2012 Château Doisy-Védrines (Barsac)**

The 2012 Doisy-Védrines is a very nice example of the vintage, with moderate acidity, but some good flavors and aromatics. The bouquet is very pretty, with notes of pear, fresh

pineapple, mandarins, bee pollen, orange zest and a touch of vanillin oak wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit flat, but with a good core of fruit, really quite good complexity for the vintage and very good length and grip. There is just a touch of less than ideal botrytis on the backend that keeps the score down a point or two, but there is a lot to like here. 2013-2035. **87.**

**2012 Château Filhot (Sauternes)**

I had some concerns that the 2012 Château Filhot was corked, but the organizers of the UGC tasting said that every bottle had shown exactly the same way and that they were convinced that the wine was not affected by TCA! In any event, the nose was rather unclean and moldy, with notes of pineapple, pear and vague honey notes rather subsumed under the mustiness. It is a full-bodied wine, but musty and moldy. Is this really the wine?

**2012 Château Guiraud (Sauternes)**

The 2012 Château Guiraud is quite ambitious, and though there is just a whiff of unclean botrytis on the palate, the wine has a laudable level of complexity and depth. The nicely glazed bouquet delivers scents of sweet grapefruit, pineapple, smoky tones, citrus peel, honey and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex, with a fine core, bright acids and lovely complexity on the very long finish. This would rate even higher, but the bit of unclean botrytis on the backend does detract just a touch from the overall pleasure of the wine. But, given the vagaries of the vintage, this is a very good bottle. 2013-2030. **87+.**

**2012 Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey (Sauternes)**

The 2012 Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey shows a fair bit of botrytis for the vintage, but not all of it is entirely clean. The nose is quite glazed in its blend of pineapple, pear, apple blossoms, chalk, honey, vanillin oak and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and not as complex as the nose suggests, with good depth and grip, bright acids, but a touch of backend bitterness from not entirely noble rot. Not bad, but not great. 2013-2030+. **85.**

**2012 Château de Malle (Sauternes)**

The 2012 Château de Malle has turned out quite well for the vintage, with a nice glazing of botrytis adding depth and brightness, if not dramatic complexity. The bouquet is a fine blend of pineapple, honeycomb, a touch of guava, orange blossoms, chalk and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fresh and nicely balanced, with very sound, framing acidity, a solid core and very nice length and grip. A very good effort from a tough vintage. 2013-2035. **87+.**

**2012 Château de Myrat (Barsac)**

Château de Myrat has really been making good wines of late and they have done a very good job with their 2012, given what difficult conditions they were faced with this year. The wine shows quite a bit of botrytis for the vintage- all of it quite clean- as it offers up scents of pineapple, mandarins, honey, orange zest, chalky soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a good core, sound acids and very good length and grip on the focused finish. A fine result for 2012. 2013-2035+. **88.**

**2012 Château Nairac (Barsac)**

I quite like the nose on the 2012 Château Nairac, but the wine is not quite as interesting on the palate. The bouquet is a fine and esthery blend of pineapple, lemon blossoms, bee pollen, chalky soil and citrus peel. However, on the palate the wine is a bit blunt and slightly hot from high alcohol, with its full-bodied format and sound acids somewhat wasted by the chunky and fairly high octane finish. Not bad, but not special. 2014-2030. **85.**

### **2012 Château de Rabaud-Promis (Sauternes)**

The 2012 Château de Rabaud-Promis is one of the stars of the vintage. The wine is quite heavily glazed, but all of the botrytis seems quite clean and helps to deliver a fine bouquet of baked apples, pineapple, honey, chalky soil tones, orange blossoms and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, bright and juicy, with a fine core, lovely grip and focus and a very long, complex and classy finish. A most impressive effort for the vintage! 2013-2035+. **90.**

### **2012 Château de Rayne-Vigneau (Sauternes)**

The 2012 Château de Rayne-Vigneau is another very good effort for the vintage, with a nice glazing of botrytis from that first initial *tranche*, but not a great deal of complexity. The deep and nobly rotten nose offers up scents of pineapple, oranges, honey, chalky soil tones, citrus peel and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerfully styled for the vintage, with a good core, relatively low acids and just a touch of backend bitterness and a sense of heat. But, all in all, a very respectable effort for the year. 2013-2030. **87+.**

### **2012 Château Romer (Sauternes)**

The 2012 Château Romer seemed to have a bit more sauvignon blanc in the blend this year than is customary- or perhaps there is just a touch of grassiness from less than ideally ripe semillon in the blend? In any case, the wine is a touch grassy on the nose in its mélange of sweet grapefruit, tart orange, bee pollen, and citrus zest. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and fairly simple, but well-balanced and reasonably long. The grip here is good, but the acids are on the low side. 2013-2030. **84.**

### **2012 Château Sigalas-Rabaud (Sauternes)**

The 2012 Château Sigalas-Rabaud is quite glazed for this vintage, as it offers up a deep and honeyed bouquet of pineapple, peach, honeycomb, orange peel and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite botrytized, with a slightly heavy-handed personality, but a good core, bright acids and very good length and grip on the focused finish. This is just a tad simple and shows a bit of backend bitterness (orange pith), but is a pretty good effort for the vintage. 2013-2035. **87.**

### **2012 Château Suau (Barsac)**

The botrytis in the 2012 Château Suau does not seem particularly clean to me, and the wine is a bit bitter on the backend as well. The nose is pretty straightforward, offering up scents of pear, a touch of pineapple, soil and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, a touch flat and simple, with moderate acids and a decided note of bitterness (like grapefruit pith) on the moderately long finish. This is okay, but no better. 2013-2030. **84.**

### **2012 S de Suduiraut**

Château Suduiraut is one of the top handful of producers in Sauternes who decided not to make a *grand vin* in the difficult 2012 vintage, and instead have opted to make a dry wine under their S de Suduiraut label and release a small quantity of sweet wine under the second label, Lions de Suduiraut. The 2012 S de Suduiraut is quite a pretty dry wine, offering up scents of grapefruit, chalk, grassy overtones and a dollop of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and bright, with a good core and lovely bounce and grip on the long finish. This is not the most complex young vintage of S de Suduiraut that I have tasted, but it is a very tasty and successful example of the vintage. 2013-2020. **88.**



## **2012 Lions de Suduiraut**

The 2012 Lions de Suduiraut is one of those very gently botrytized and ethereal examples of Sauternes that I often find very flexible at the table. The delicately glazed nose wafts from the glass in a stylish blend of coconut, a touch of pineapple, chalky soil tones, honeycomb and a wee bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, light and pretty, with sound depth, bright acids and sneaky length and grip on the focused and bouncy finish. A very stylish example of a lighter-bodied Sauternes. 2013-2030. **87.**

## **2012 Château La Tour Blanche (Sauternes)**

The 2012 Château La Tour Blanche shows a nice touch of botrytis and lovely cleanliness to its noble rot elements. The classy bouquet is a blend of pineapple, pear, a touch of tangerine, chalk, citrus peel and a gentle base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pretty straightforward, with fine focus and balance, solid mid-palate concentration and very good length and grip on the poised finish. A few more *tranches* to work with here really would have mounted the complexity of the wine, but this is certainly a very successful example of the vintage. 2013-2030. **88.**

## **Graves Blanc**

*Despite all the early hype that surrounded the 2011 vintage of dry white wines from the Graves region- hype which I did not find met with reality when I tasted the wines a year ago- the 2012s as a group are far more complete and compelling wines than their counterparts from the previous vintage. The 2012 whites are quite open-knit structurally, but with lovely bounce and brightness to their fruit components, lovely signatures of soil and plenty of framing acids to give lift and precision on the palate. It is not a particularly concentrated vintage for white wines, but the wines show off superb balance and focus, good mid-palate intensity and impressive length and grip in their wide open and quite engaging styles. At this early stage, the 2012s do not have the same cut and length as the 2007s did at a similar stage of development and are not quite in the same league, but overall, it is a very, very satisfying vintage for dry white wines and probably the most universally successful category of 2012 Bordeaux- though even the best dry white wines of this vintage are not in the same quality level as the very best red wines from this year. Of the notes that follow, all wines are Pessac-Léognan unless otherwise indicated- as a few of these châteaux only classify as Bordeaux Blanc bottlings. As is my custom with other young white wines from regions afflicted with premature oxidation, the windows of drinkability here are included as if premox did not exist and are estimates of how the wines will age under a best-case scenario. Of course, with premox every bit as prevalent with white Bordeaux as it is with white Burgundy, the reality is that a majority of bottles will not age in this manner and succumb to premox long before they would have back in the day. However, using a range of peak drinkability for a given wine that acts as if premox did not exist seems at least useful to me to indicate the structure of the wine out of the blocks and gives a good indication of whether or not it would drink better with a certain period of bottle age.*

## **2012 Château Bouscaut Blanc**

The 2012 Bouscaut Blanc is a very good wine, but the sample we tasted had seen its sulfur adjusted fairly recently and was still showing a bit of SO<sub>2</sub> on the nose. Underneath is a very good wine, offering up scents of grapefruit, lime peel, petrol, gentle grassiness and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and nascently complex, with a very respectable core of fruit, moderate, framing acids and good focus, grip and balance on the long

and bouncy finish. This is a very good bottle in the making and my score may be a touch on the conservative side, due to the bit of aromatic blockage caused by the sulfur on the nose of these samples. 2013-2020+? **88.**

#### **2012 Château Carbonnieux Blanc**

The 2012 Carbonnieux Blanc is a lovely wine in the making, jumping from the glass in an expressive and vibrant mélange of lemon, tart orange, grapefruit, a touch of fresh-cut grass, citrus peel, beeswax and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and beautifully complex out of the blocks, with a good core of fruit, crisp acids and superb focus and grace on the long and zesty finish. This is a lovely example of the vintage. 2013-2023+? **92.**

#### **2012 Château Chantegrive “Caroline” Blanc (Bordeaux)**

The 2012 Château Chantegrive “Caroline” Blanc has turned out beautifully and will offer up very good drinking over the next five to seven years. The very pretty bouquet offers up scents of grapefruit, tart orange, petrol, grassy overtones, just a touch of chalk and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, suave and classy, with sound depth, lovely framing acids and impressive length and grip on the juicy and quite forward finish. This is a fine result and an excellent value! 2013-2020+? **89.**

#### **2012 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc**

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

#### **2012 Château Ferrande Blanc (Bordeaux)**

The 2012 Château Ferrande Blanc is not one of the top wines of the vintage, with an overtly grassy aromatic profile and a rather *fluide* palate impression. The bouquet is a mix of damp grass, lemon, grapefruit, a touch of petrol and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and a bit hollow at the core, with sound acids, but little stuffing or grip on the short finish. 2013-2020. **82.**

#### **2012 Château de Fieuzal Blanc**

The 2012 de Fieuzal Blanc is a delicious wine right out of the blocks, and though this is one of the more gently structured successes of the vintage and will need to be drunk on the young side, there is a lot of pleasure to be had here. The very wide open nose offers up scents of fresh figs, grapefruit, beeswax, plenty of petrol, citrus zest, a bit of grassiness and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and already quite complex, with a good core, rather soft acids, but good length and focus on the fairly long finish. The wine wants for a bit of backend cut and grip, but it does offer up a lot of personality and will be a lovely wine for near-term consumption. 2013-2018+? **89.**

#### **2012 Château de France Blanc**

The 2012 Château de France Blanc is quite successful this year, with a very slightly heavy-handed style that does not possess the same bounce, delicacy and lift as the very best examples of the vintage, but which does deliver impressive depth and personality. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex constellation of grapefruit, green apple, grassy tones, petrol, beeswax, chalky and a generous coating of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied, complex and quite generous on the attack, with a good core and a long, crisp and flavorful finish. The style here is just a tad on the obvious side, but there is a lot of stuffing here and very good structure and length. A fine result. 2013-2023. **90.**

#### **2012 Château Haut Bergey Blanc**

The 2012 Haut Bergey Blanc is a very good wine in the making, offering up a classy nose of fresh fig, lime, petrol, fresh-cut grass, chalky soil tones, citrus peel and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and complex, with a pretty good core, fine framing acids and a long, focused finish. There is just a touch of backend oak tannin here that still needs to be integrated (and the wine would have been even more interesting with a bit less new wood), but there is sufficient stuffing here to absorb it over the next year or two and the wine will be quite tasty. 2013-2020+. **88.**

#### **2012 La Clarté de Haut-Brion Blanc**

The 2012 La Clarté de Haut-Brion Blanc, at fully 13.95 percent alcohol, is one of the ripest white wines I tasted from this vintage, only being eclipsed to my knowledge by its stable-mates, Haut-Brion Blanc and La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc (perhaps Pape Clément Blanc is also up here in this range- the technical data was not available at the UGC tasting), and consequently, the wine has missed out on the bouncy freshness and vivacity exhibited by the top white Graves in this vintage. The wine this year is a blend of fifty-eight percent semillon and forty-two percent sauvignon blanc and offers up a ripe and fairly complex nose of grapefruit, green apple, citrus zest, a touch of petrol and a rather strident dollop of raw new oak (really quite sawdusty in nature at this point in time). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite simple, with reasonable core, musky ripeness and uncovered wood tannin sticking out on the finish. When I think back to the case of this wine that I drank with such pleasure in the 1994 vintage, I cannot believe how far the quality has fallen for this wine! 2013-2019+? **87.**

#### **2012 Château Haut-Brion Blanc**

Why Haut-Brion Blanc had to be over fourteen percent alcohol in this vintage (tipping the scales at 14.15 percent) is beyond me, but there it is- a ripe, musky and impressively mediocre rendition of what used to be one of the world's greatest dry white wines. The bouquet is a blend of fig, orange, a touch of acacia blossom, petrol, beeswax, a touch of pastry cream and vanillin oak (mercifully better-integrated than in the 2012 La Clarté de Haut-Brion Blanc!). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and carries its alcohol well, with a bit of a dip in the mid-palate, good acids and fine length and grip on the ripe and fairly inelegant finish. A remarkably unimpressive vintage of Haut-Brion Blanc- and this is a fine vintage for white Graves. How the mighty have fallen! 2016-2025+? **88.**

#### **2012 Château La Louvière Blanc**

The 2012 Château La Louvière Blanc is really an exquisite wine in the making and it pains me to think that a significant percentage of this wine will still be bottled under screwcap for less sophisticated markets such as the US. The bouquet is deep, pure and really lovely and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of tart orange, lime zest, petrol, complex, chalky soil tones, gentle grassiness and a stylish base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very refined, with a good core of fruit, fine focus, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the stylish finish. This will be a classic middleweight with a few years of bottle age and really is a delightful bottle of Château La Louvière Blanc. It reminds me quite a bit of the lovely 2001 here. 2013-2025+. **92.**

### **2012 Château Larrivet-Haut-Brion Blanc**

The 2012 Château Larrivet-Haut-Brion Blanc offers up a reasonably deep bouquet, but the wine seems just a touch “forced” stylistically and is not in the top division of 2012 white Bordeaux as a result. The nose is not overly complex, but deep, as it offers up scents of fig, grapefruit, petrol, plenty of grassiness and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerful in personality, with a good core and sound acids, but a rather blunt finish that closes with a bit of bitterness. This is okay, but a lighter hand in the cellar would have produced a far more interesting wine, as there are clearly some good raw materials here. 2013-2020. **85+?**

### **2012 Château Latour-Martillac Blanc**

Château Latour-Martillac is really making some superb wines these days- both red and white- and their 2012 Blanc is lovely. The deep, vibrant and classy nose wafts from the glass in a mix of fresh lime, pink grapefruit, chalk, grassy overtones, petrol and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp, complex and quite classy, with a good (but, not great) core, bright acids and very fine length and grip on the complex and wide open finish. This is a classic example of the 2012 white Graves vintage- open, zesty and beautifully balanced, and it will provide plenty of fine drinking over the next decade. 2013-2023. **90.**

### **2012 Château Malartic-Lagravière Blanc**

The 2012 Château Malartic-Lagravière Blanc is another example of the vintage that shows off a lot of fine raw materials, but which is crafted in a rather blunt style that takes away more than a bit of charm of the vintage. The complex and slightly forced nose offers up scents of fig, green apple, fresh-cut grass, petrol, chalk and plenty of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and a bit forced stylistically, with a good core and focus, but a slightly dry-edged finish from sloppy new oak on the backend. There is probably enough stuffing here to eventually carry the lumber, but this wine could have been stellar, rather than merely okay with a lighter hand with the new wood. 2013-2020. **86.**

### **2012 Château La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc**

The 2012 La Mission Haut-Brion Blanc is the ripest of the three white wines produced by the Dillon family in this vintage, coming in at a rather strident 14.6 percent alcohol. Needless to say, the wine is not one of the great white wines to be found in the Graves in this vintage. The very ripe and musky nose offers up scents of figs, oranges, a touch of petrol, citrus peel, chalky and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and heady, with good acids, but also plenty of heat poking out on the long finish. This is a big, powerful and cumbersome wine that is a far cry from the great Laville Haut-Brions of yesteryear. Perhaps the name change was a good idea, as it signaled a distinct departure from great classic white Graves of exemplary quality for parts unknown. This is very disappointing by any measure, but particularly in the context of a fine vintage for dry white wines in the Graves. 2013-2025+? **87.**

### **2012 Château Olivier Blanc**

The 2012 Château Olivier Blanc is quite good this year, with again, just a touch too much new wood for its own good, but lovely complexity and mid-palate stuffing. The fine bouquet offers up scents of green apple, fresh fig, grassy tones, lime peel and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and intensely flavored, with a fine core, crisp acids and very good length and grip on the finish. The oak here is a bit heavy-handed on the palate, but the wine has enough stuffing to carry it. Not bad and could have been exceptional with better wood philosophy. 2013-2023. **88.**

### **2012 Château Pape Clément Blanc**

I am so accustomed to the Pape Clément Blanc being one of the best wines of the vintage that the rather lackluster showing of the 2012 was a bit of a surprise. As I tasted two different samples of this wine at the UGC tasting, I have to assume that this really is the wine this year. The nose is very ripe and rather deep-pitched for the vintage, offering up scents of fig, baked apple, beeswax, citrus peel, petrol, chalky soil tones and a stylish base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite noticeably riper than any other white Graves I tasted on this trip, with a good core, rather soft acids and a touch of heat on the backend. The finish is long and reasonably complex, but one gets the distinct impression that this is one white Graves where the style of the vintage was struggled against, rather than embraced. The wine is okay, but by the high standards of this estate's white wine, it is as swing and a miss. 2013-2020.

**88.**

### **2012 Château Picque-Caillou Blanc**

The 2012 Picque-Caillou Blanc is not one of the more successful wines of the vintage. The simple nose offers up scents of grapefruit, fig, petrol, chalk and plenty of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and reasonably crisp, but absolutely flattened by its new wood regimen. The finish is flat, dull and overly woody. 2013-2018. **82.**

### **2012 Château Rahoul Blanc (Bordeaux)**

The 2012 Château Rahoul Blanc is another less than successful dry white wine in this vintage, without the stuffing or grip of the better examples. The nose is a blend of grapefruit, lemon, petrol, a touch of beeswax, grassiness and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex, but rather watery, with good focus, rather gentle acids and a soft, balanced and slightly flat finish. This is okay, but not special. 2013-2018. **83.**

### **2012 Château Smith Haut-Lafitte Blanc**

The days when Smith Haut-Lafitte Blanc was one of the most elegant and ethereal wines of the region are apparently now in the rearview mirror. The 2012 version offers up a beautiful nose and a rather heavy-handed, forced and overly oaky palate impression that is a far cry from the superb white wines made here the wines here were anointed. The lovely nose is a blend of fresh figs, petrol, chalky soil tones, beeswax, lime zest, grass tones and plenty of vanillin oak. On the palate, the classy nose is wasted, as the wine is deep, full-bodied and very forced in personality, with a blunt, over-oaked finish that is fairly short and certainly charmless. This is a dull, obvious and uncouth wine for the un-initiated. 2013-2020. **86.**

### **Graves Rouge**

*I read and heard reports that the Graves region was particularly blessed in 2012 and avoided many of the issues of hydric stress and uneven ripening that plagued other regions on the Left Bank, but if this was the case, I had a hard time discovering this with the pretty spotty range of red wines that I tasted from this commune during my ten days here in the spring. These days, with so many modern wines produced here, it is really a pretty depressing range of wines to run through when the En Primeur calendar comes around to the UGC Graves tastings, as I am old enough to remember just how many good red wines used to be produced here before the big name consultants were enlisted to lay this region to waste. Anyone who tells you the Graves reds are one of the sweet spots in 2012 either cannot taste or has a reason to promote the modern style here, as the red wines in general here have probably never been worse in the Graves than they are today. Intuitively, one can imagine that the same traits that favored the Right Bank in 2012 also assisted in delivering superior raw materials in the Graves, but there is*

*scant little evidence of this in the glass. There are a few real bright spots, such as Châteaux La Louvière, de Fieuzal, les Carmes Haut-Brion and La Tour Martillac, but in general, the quality level for red wines here these days is about as low as anywhere in Bordeaux, and there were a depressingly large number of inherently flawed reds produced here in this vintage. Oh well, at least there are a lot of good white wines to be found in this commune in 2012.*



*Château Haut-Brion- Pessac-Léognan' s greatest estate and currently one of its biggest mysteries.*

### **2012 Château Bouscaut**

The 2012 Château Bouscaut is a modern wine that avoids any over the top personality traits (thanks to the inherent elegance of the vintage), but this is not a particularly successful wine. The sappy nose is a blend of black cherries, blueberries, chocolate, cigar smoke and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pumped up on the attack, with modest mid-palate depth and plenty of dry oak tannins cutting short the finish. This will need a few years to try to absorb at least some of its oak, and then will probably need to be drunk up fairly briskly over the next decade or so, as eventually, the fruit will succumb to the over-oaking and the wine will dry out again on its way to the grave. 2018-2030? **83.**

### **2012 Château Carbonnieux**

The Carbonnieux rouge in 2012 is a bit chunky and slightly dry-edged, but in a vintage with so many train wrecks to be found amongst the red wines, this is not too bad. The you and sappy nose is a blend of black cherries, blueberries, chocolate, cigar smoke and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit four-square, but with a good core, and reasonably good balance on the long and slightly dry-edged tannic finish. There is certainly

sufficient stuffing here to absorb the wood with bottle age, and while this will never be particularly elegant, it is not bad for its more modern genre. 2019-2035. **85.**

#### **2012 Château Les Carmes Haut-Brion**

The 2012 Château Les Carmes Haut-Brion is clearly the finest wine I have tasted from this estate since the 2005, and it may well be superior to that wine as well. This is a modern wine that has really turned out quite well in this vintage, offering up a new oaky and complex nose of black cherries, plums, chocolate, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very classy, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance and a very long, chewy and youthfully complex finish. I am not sure if any of the cellar techniques were changed here in 2012 (typically, the wine is raised in fifty to sixty percent new wood and undergoes one hundred percent malo in barrel) or if the inherent elegance of the vintage dovetailed seamlessly with the winemaking style this year, but for whatever reason, the 2012 Château Les Carmes Haut-Brion is really excellent! A sleeper of the vintage. 2022-2050. **90+.**

#### **2012 Château de Chantegrive**

The 2012 Château de Chantegrive is a ripe and fairly modern wine, offering up a simple nose of sappy black cherries and cassis, tobacco smoke, a bit of tar and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and dried out on the backend from uncovered new wood tannins, with good raw materials laid to waste by sloppy and unprofessional cellar technique. 2017-2030+? **82.**

#### **2012 Domaine de Chevalier**

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

#### **2012 Château de Fieuzal**

The 2012 Château de Fieuzal rouge is the best red wine I have tasted from this estate in quite some time. I am not sure if there have been changes made in the cellars here, but the 2012 is really a pretty nice example of the vintage, offering up a plush bouquet of plums, black cherries, chocolate, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones and a discreet base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, suave and quite elegant on the attack, with a sappy core, ripe tannins and good length and grip on the focused finish. This is just a touch “slick” stylistically, but poised, balanced and exudes the charm of the 2012 vintage and is really a very successful example. 2019-2035+. **87+.**

#### **2012 Château Ferrande**

The 2012 Château Ferrande is a horrible wine, delivering an out of balance and withered palate impression and a typically over-worked nose of tar, pine resin, a bit of cassis and plenty of raw, sawdusty and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and shows just a bit of sweet fruit on the attack, but this is decapitated in the mid-palate by an onslaught of uncovered and astringent oak tannin. The finish shows a bit of tariness to go with the lumberyard. Ugh. ??? **77.**



### **2012 Château de France**

The 2012 Château de France is a modern and very simple wine, but at least not over the top stylistically. The wine offers up a bouquet of sappy black cherries and blackberries, coffee bean, cigar smoke, a touch of tariness and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly heavily extracted, with a solid core, but some green tannins from uneven ripening combining with uncovered wood tannins on the finish to scar the wine. Not a successful outing for Château de France in this vintage. 2017-2025? **80.**

### **2012 Château Haut-Bailly**

I am so accustomed to Château Haut-Bailly being one of the red wines stars in the appellation these days that I was surprised by the multiple showings of the wine on this trip, as its customary breed and elegance were overshadowed in 2012 by a bit too much aggressive oak spice from the new wood. The nose is quite classic and elegant under the wood, with notes of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, lovely, dark soil tones nicely nestled in underneath a veritable onslaught of Taransaud oak spice. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and very refined on the attack, with a good core, but a significant serving of dry oak tannins shortening the finish and really detracting from early pleasure. There is probably sufficient depth of fruit here to eventually carry all this lumber, but the wine has emphatically not been improved by the wood regimen in the cellars here this year. It is a pity, as I expected that the inherent elegance of the vintage would find a perfect dance partner in Haut-Bailly in 2012! 2018-2035+. **87+.**

### **2012 Château Haut-Bergey**

The 2012 Château Haut-Bergey is a thoroughly modern and boring wine. The pumped up nose is a blend of boysenberry, blueberry, chocolate, cigar ash and spicy, nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, plump and exceedingly simple, with a solid core, a four-square personality, and a dry-edged and quite rigid finish. This will eventually dry out, but may offer a brief window where it can be chewed through with a modicum of pleasure. 2016-2025? **82.**

### **2012 Le Clarence de Haut-Brion**

The 2012 Le Clarence de Haut-Brion is a very ripe example of the vintage, tipping the scales at a hefty 14.65 percent alcohol. The blend is comprised of forty-one percent merlot, forty-three percent cabernet sauvignon, fourteen percent cabernet franc and two percent petit verdot. Despite the high alcohol, the wine is relatively “cool” in its aromatic profile of black cherries, dark berries, tobacco smoke, a lovely base of soil and plenty of very aggressive, spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite classy on the attack, with a good core and focus, but plenty of uncovered oak tannins on the dry-edged backend that will need to be absorbed for the wine to offer a degree of pleasurable drinking. There is probably enough stuffing here to carry the wood eventually, but the entire profile of this wine, with its heady ripeness and all of the oak just seems contradictory to the Haut-Brion historical legacy of uncompromising complexity and refinement, as this wine is neither. The drift here continues. 2019-2030+? **84.**

### **2012 Château Haut-Brion**

I fully expected greatness from Haut-Brion this year, but that is not the case with this over the top 2012. The alcohol is a crazy 14.9 percent and the wine has been over-oaked and will need plenty of time to try and absorb its lumberyard of spicy wood. The blend is 65.5 percent merlot, 32.5 percent cabernet sauvignon and two percent cabernet franc. The bouquet is currently the best part of the wine, offering up a classy blend of black cherries, cassis, cigar wrapper, dark

soil tones, coffee bean and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a good core, fine focus and a very long, astringent and overly woody finish. The backend balance on this wine today is extremely poor and one wonders how long it is going to take for the new wood here to be integrated into the wine- if it will ever fully do so over the course of the wine's life! By a wide margin, Haut-Brion is making the worst wines of all the First Growths today and one really misses the days of Jean Delmas here, when this was the best of the First Growths, instead of the least! Whatever the changes were here since the days of Monsieur Delmas, it is high time that they were undone and Haut-Brion was restored to its rightful place alongside Lafite Rothschild as the most elegant of the Firsts, as this monster truck era at the estate is getting old really fast. 2020-2040? **83.**

#### **2012 Château La Louvière**

The samples of 2012 Château La Louvière at the UGC tasting were all slightly reduced, but underneath was clearly a wine of fine potential. The deep and classic nose offers up scents of black cherries, plums, a touch of lavender, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones and a nice base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, a nice sense of reserve and impressive length and grip on the focused and still quite primary finish. This is going to be a lovely wine, and given that the samples were slightly reduced, there is a strong possibility that I am slightly underrating this wine. 2022-2050. **89-90+?**

#### **2012 Château Larrivet-Haut-Brion**

The 2012 Château Larrivet-Haut-Brion is another completely modern wine, with a bit too much extraction and a tad too much new oak combining to create a decidedly rigid backend on the palate. The bouquet is a modern blend of black cherries, blueberries, chocolate, nutty new oak and a touch of dill pickle in the upper register as it opens in the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chunky in personality, with a good core and dry-edged tannins from the oak turning the fairly short finish to the astringent side of the ledger. There is probably the stuffing to eventually carry the lumber here, but the rigidity is going to be its defining element throughout the course of its relatively short life. In all honesty, I cannot understand the purpose of making a wine such as this. 2018-2030? **81.**

#### **2012 Château Latour-Martillac**

Château Latour-Martillac has been on a hot streak with their red wines in the last several vintages and the steady hand at the helm here has fashioned another lovely wine in 2012. The deep, complex and classic nose wafts from the glass in a blend of cassis, black cherries, dark chocolate, cigar wrapper, gravel, violets and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with a lovely core of fruit, chewy tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. Here is a perfect example of what most 2012 Graves *rouge* bottlings should have been like stylistically, as this is really a lovely and utterly classic wine in the making. A great value! 2022-2050. **90+.**

#### **2012 Château Malartic-Lagravière**

The 2012 Château Malartic-Lagravière is a modern wine where the restraint of the vintage has worked nicely to give the wine shape and a bit of sophistication. The bouquet is a pretty blend of black cherries, blueberries, dark chocolate, cigar smoke and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plump on the attack, with a good core, just a whisper of over-extraction in its personality profile, but with well-integrated tannins and very good length and grip on the finish. This is thoroughly modern in style, but a success in 2012. 2020-2045+. **88.**

### **2012 La Chapelle de la Mission Haut-Brion**

It is funny that the 2012 La Chapelle de la Mission Haut-Brion is so much lower in octane than its *grand vin* this year, but it is fully three-quarters of a percent lower in alcohol (14.2 versus 14.95 percent) and it may turn out to be the superior wine over the long haul. I say that with some reservation, as this wine is also over-oaked and will need to be able to carry its heavy lumber to have a chance of coming out well with bottle age, and this is by no means a certainty at this point in time. The nose is very good on the wine, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, dark berries, cigar smoke, a nice base of soil and boatloads of spicy, aggressive new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex on the attack, a sound core, but with a rigid and utterly charmless structural harness and a totally astringent finish of uncovered oak tannins on the backend. Can this wine really absorb all of this new wood? 2019-2030+? **80-86?**

### **2012 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

I am not really sure what there is to say about a 2012 claret that tips the scales at 14.95 percent alcohol. The blend on the La Mission this year is sixty-two percent merlot and thirty-eight percent cabernet sauvignon and the wine was raised in seventy-five percent new oak. The very ripe and simple nose offers up scents of boysenberry, black cherries, cigar wrapper, gravel and tons of aggressive, spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and reasonably polished on the attack, with a solid core and a totally dry and astringent finish. The wine certainly has enough stuffing to absorb the wood eventually, but there will still be a heavy price to pay in terms of textural elegance and complexity from such a heavy load of lumber. There is decent length here and the acids are also pretty good, so the wine at least avoids the heavy-handed and flat impression of the least successful wines of the vintage, but this is supposed to be La Mission Haut-Brion, not some third division St. Émilion trying to get noticed by hiring one of the ham-fisted consultants to pick too late and over-oak the wine to try and garner some attention in the least sophisticated claret reviewing circles! What a disappointing result in what should have been a great vintage for La Mission. 2020-2040. **85.**

### **2012 Château Olivier**

The 2012 Château Olivier is over-extracted and consequently, rather dense and charmless on both the nose and palate at the present time. The bouquet is a mélange of dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, herbs and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite simple, with a dense core and a fair bit of dry-edged tannins from both new wood and extraction. There is ample depth here to eventually resolve the tannins, but it seems likely that this will always be a bit charmless. However, if it does absorb its oak and start to show a bit more delineation with bottle age, it could turn out to be a pretty solid example of the vintage. If it does so, then the wine will merit a score at the top end of the range. If the wine remains as heavy-handed as it is out of the blocks, then the lower end of the range may prove to be a touch overly generous. 2020-2040. **82-87?**

### **2012 Château Pape Clément**

Like the DDC rouge in this vintage, the 2012 Château Pape Clément is a bit over-extracted and also pushes the envelope of uncovered wood tannins a touch on the finish, but it probably has the stuffing to eventually integrate its oak with sufficient bottle age. There is just a faint hint of bug spray in the upper register of the wine on the nose, but underneath is a complex blend of black cherries, blackberries, dark chocolate, gravel, cigar smoke and plenty of spicy, nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly well-balanced, with a slightly dense personality from the extraction, good focus and a long, chewy and tannic finish.

This is not a great example of Pape Clément by any stretch of the imagination, but the wine seems likely to survive its cellar regiment and eventually offer up pretty solid drinking in the future. 2020-2040+? **89.**

#### **2012 Château Picque-Caillou**

The 2012 Château Picque-Caillou is a modern wine that has seen the restraint of the vintage assist in giving the wine some charm. The bouquet is a straightforward blend of black cherries, plums, chocolate, cigar wrapper, plenty of nutty new oak and just a whisper of glue in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chunky and quite extracted, with chewy and slightly dry-edged tannins and pretty good length and grip on the finish. This is okay in its genre, but the note of glue is not particularly enjoyable. 2018-2030. **83.**

#### **2012 Château Rahoul**

The 2012 Château Rahoul is another absolute failure in this vintage. The deep, tarry and resinous nose offers up dank black fruit, mud, pine tar and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and muddled on the attack, withered and astringent from uncovered oak tannins on the short finish. At least the wine is short! I cannot imagine this wine ever providing even a modicum of pleasure in the glass. ??? **72.**

#### **2012 Château Smith Haut-Lafitte**

The 2012 Château Smith Haut-Lafitte offers up a slick and modern nose of black cherries, blueberries, mocha, Cuban cigars and plenty of nutty, luxuriant new oak. On the palate the wine is spit-polished, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, not particularly deep at the core, and with a decidedly astringent backend from uncovered oak tannins on the manipulated finish. This is a good wine for label drinkers, as the paper will probably taste better than the wine in a decade's time. One of the worst wines I have had from Château Smith Haut-Lafitte in a long time. 2019-2030+? **81.**

#### ***Lalande de Pomerol, Fronsac and Côtes du Castillon***

*I tasted a fair number of examples from the satellite appellations of Pomerol and St. Émilion, as I hoped the fine prospects on the Right Bank in 2012 might translate into a bit better proportion of good wines here than has been the case in the more difficult Right Bank vintages of 2009, 2010 and 2011. Sadly, this was not the case, as too many estates here are still bent on spoofulating their wines to the fullest extent that their more limited resources will allow-mimicking their wealthier and no less uninspired colleagues in St. Émilion that turn over the vineyards and cellars to one or another high-priced consultant to make the same cookie-cutter modern wines. There were a few wines here that really stood out this year for their quality and consequently, for their good value, including Châteaux La Fleur de Bouärd, Grand Village and Tournefeuille (though the 2012 here was by far the oakiest example I have tasted yet from this fine property), but in general, this is a group of estates that really needs to look back to their glory days in the decade of the 1980s and start making wines again in that mold. The potential here remains as high as it has ever been, and it is really the stylistic drift amongst so many producers in the Right Bank satellites that keeps these wines from finding a wider audience and starting to build up the constant clientele that will result in a bit better prices and each new vintage selling through with ease. I fully understand that there is not a lot of margin here at most estates, as prices are low and there is only so much that can be done in terms of selection and other quality-oriented measures. But, on the other hand, using significantly less new oak would be a great savings in terms of expense and would produce so much better wines, as the number of slavishly over-oaked wines in these appellations is really quite appalling- as any*

*attendee of the Cercle de Rive Droit tastings in recent years can attest. With the prices so dizzyingly high for top flight Pomerols and the very best St. Émilions these days, there is a very real and very large opportunity staring these producers in the face each vintage, but they simply need to make well-balanced wines that show off their Right Bank pedigree- rather than wines tasting like boringly generic modern wines straight out of the lumber yard! I keep hoping more owners here are going to wake up and start making wines along the lines of the lovely 1985 Château Grand Ormeau that I am still drinking out of my cellar with great enjoyment- for wines of this ilk will instantly find a great following in the marketplace. Come on folks, it is time to wake up and start once again making classic wines here that could capture the imagination of Bordeaux lovers starved for old school Right Bank wines at fair prices!*

### **2012 l'Ambroisie du Château La Croix des Moines (Lalande de Pomerol)**

The 2012 l'Ambroisie du Château La Croix des Moines is a dull and modern wine, delivering a nose of boysenberry, blackberry, chocolate, damp earth, a touch of peanut and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and hollow at the core, with dry tannins and a short, simple finish. Mediocre. 2018-2028. **83.**

### **2012 Château La Chenade (Lalande de Pomerol)**

This is a selection of younger vines made from l'Église-Clinet's Denis Durantou's property of Les Cruzelles. The 2012 version was a bit reduced at the time of my visit to the estate, so perhaps I am underrating the wine a bit, but it seems to me to be a rather dense wine with a dry edge on the backend that does not bode particularly well for its evolution in bottle. The deep nose is a blend of cassis, dark berries, a bit of tar, herb tones, espresso and resinous new wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, four-square and rather inky in personality, with some dry-edged tannins from the wood poking out uncovered on the finish. This is okay in its ham-fisted style, but shows little style and is not a wine I would particularly care to drink. 2019-2035. **83+?**

### **2012 Château de Chambrun (Lalande de Pomerol)**

The 2012 Château de Chambrun is a combination of ripe and underripe flavors and aromatics. The bouquet is a mix of black raspberries, a touch of dill pickle, chocolate, smoke and new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and not too bad on the attack, but with dry-edged wood tannins exacerbating the balance issues here (as the wine is already well-endowed with skin tannins in this vintage) on the reasonably long finish. Hard to see how these rather discordant elements are ever going to be tied together into a harmonious whole. 2018-2025+? **82.**

### **2012 Château Les Cruzelles (Lalande de Pomerol)**

The 2012 Les Cruzelles is far more interesting than the second wine from the property, but it too is a bit dense and is not a style of wine I would choose to make if I were the winemaker here. The ripe nose offers up scents of black cherries, dark berries, tar, cigar ash, dark soil tones and mocha-like new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite backward, with good concentration, firm tannins and good length and grip on the slightly resinous finish. There is certainly the stuffing here to carry its wood with more bottle age, and it seems likely to develop quite a bit more personality over time than the 2012 La Chenade, but this is still a fairly heavy-handed style of wine. Not bad in it style. 2019-2040. **87.**

### **2012 Château La Fleur de Bouärd (Lalande de Pomerol)**

Château La Fleur de Bouärd is one of the properties in the Angélus stable, and ironically, it is better this year than its most famous and recently-promoted partner. Aromatically, this is

really quite fine, offering up a complex nose of plums, black cherries, dark chocolate, cigar smoke, soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off a good core of fruit (none of the dip in the mid-palate here that is so obvious with the 2012 Angélus for those tasting the wine, not reading the label), ripe, firm tannins, good acidity and fine length and grip. This is good juice and a fine value. 2022-2045. **89.**

#### **2012 Château Grand Village (Bordeaux Supérieure)**

The 2012 Grand Village, from the Guinaudeau family of Château Lafleur fame, is really lovely this year and one of the great bargains to be found in the vintage. As readers may recall, this is in reality a Lalande de Pomerol, but some of the estate's vineyards carry on over the communal boundary, and as these parcels are some of the oldest on the property, the Guinaudeau family prefers to simply label their Grand Village as a "Bordeaux Supérieure", so that they can use the old vines. The *cépages* of the 2012 Grand Villages is ninety-three percent merlot this year (reflecting the success of that varietal in this vintage- the vineyards include at least a quarter cabernet franc) and offers up a fairly ripe and very classy nose of plums, black cherries, chocolate, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and just a touch of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very refined, with a good core, ripe tannins and a long and nicely tangy finish. A lovely bottle in the making. 2019-2035+. **88+.**

#### **2012 Château Grand Village "G" Acte 4 (Bordeaux Supérieure)**

The old vine bottling from Grand Village, labeled this year as "G- Acte 4", is a fifty-fifty blend of merlot and cabernet franc, with the cab franc hailing from a parcel in Fronsac on thin soils over a deep base of hard limestone that is really quite similar to the soils of the plateau of St. Émilion. Happily, these old cabernet franc vines did not suffer excessively from the hydric stress of mid-summer and the resulting wine is superb, wafting from the glass in a lovely aromatic blend of cassis, dark berries, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones and a nice, judicious touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very elegant, with a fine core of fruit, good acids and lovely length and grip on the long and suavely tannic finish. This is a terrific bottle in the making and another superb value in the 2012 vintage! 2019-2040. **90+.**

#### **2012 Château Grand Village Blanc (Bordeaux Supérieure)**

The Guinaudeau family has planted sauvignon blanc and semillon on some of the vineyard parcels over the deep base of limestone subsoil on the estate, and the 2012 Grand Village Blanc has certainly benefited from the favorable white wine vintage. The nose is really quite stylish, offering up scents of green apple, a touch of tangerine, gentle grassy tones, chalky soil nuances and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is fullish, juicy and quite tasty, with a good core of fruit, sound acids and very nice length and grip on the focused and bouncy finish. This is still relatively young vines, so this is going to be a far more serious wine down the road, but the 2012 has really turned out quite well. 2013-2017+. **87.**

#### **2012 Château Grande Ormeau (Lalande de Pomerol)**

As I am still drinking the beautifully classic and refined 1985 Grand Ormeau out of my cellar, I was dismayed to see how ineptly modern the 2012 version is this year. The pumped up nose is a blend of black raspberries, black cherries, chocolate, cigar ash, dark soil and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and already quite dried out on the backend from uncovered, raw oak tannins. Clearly this wine had potential, but it died an ignominious death in the cellar from overly rigid and wrong-headed technique. There was a day when Grand Ormeau was one of the great values in all of Bordeaux, but those days are long gone. 2018-2025. **80.**

**2012 Château Jean de Gué (Lalande de Pomerol)**

The 2012 Château Jean de Gué is a dull and heavy-handed wine on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up scents of saddle leather, black raspberries, herbs, Cuban cigars and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and slightly dry from uncovered oak tannins on the reasonably long finish. There is probably sufficient stuffing here to eventually absorb the wood, but it will remain always a simple and jammy wine of minimal merit. 2019-2030. **83.**

**2012 Château Montlandrie (Côtes du Castillon)**

This is another of Denis Durantou's properties, and it is one of the less interesting wines in his lineup of 2012s. The wine is quite marked by its new wood component on both the nose and palate today, offering up scents of dark berries, black cherries, coffee bean, a bit of dark soil and a fair bit of resinous new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite tannic, with a bit of a dry edge on the backend, a good core and a long, rather charmless finish. There is sufficient stuffing here to absorb the new wood with bottle age, but this seems more than likely to always be a wine that will not offer much elegance or complexity. Modern and dull. 2020-2040. **84.**

**2012 Château Perron "La Fleur" (Lalande de Pomerol)**

The 2012 Château Perron "La Fleur" is another jammy and modern wine of modest interest. The bouquet is a blend of boysenberry, chocolate, dark soil and raw, spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, fat and dull, with a long, chewy and slightly dry-edged finish of no complexity or bounce. Restrained, dull modernity. 2018-2030. **82.**

**2012 Château Saint Jean de Lavaud "1.1" (Lalande de Pomerol)**

This was a new wine to me that I crossed paths with at the Cercle de Rive Droite tasting, and it was a modern and poorly made wine. The nose is predictably concocted, offering up scents of boysenberry, framboise, chocolate and a very generous coating of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and dried out on the backend, with a tarry finish that turns astringent from dry wood tannins. At least it is low in alcohol, but there is nothing here to recommend. 2017-2030? **79.**

**2012 Château La Sergue (Lalande de Pomerol)**

The 2012 La Sergue is a modern and resinous wine of little complexity or classic claret personality. The nose is a blend of black raspberries, woodsmoke, a touch of meatiness, chocolate syrup and resinous new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, dull and slightly dry on the backend, with a respectable core and a simple, chewy finish. The balance here is okay, but I would never pick this anonymously international wine as a Lalande de Pomerol. 2019-2035. **84.**

**2012 Château Siaurac (Lalande de Pomerol)**

The 2012 Château Siaurac is a dull, modern and pumped up wine of very little interest. The nose is a predictably simple blend of black raspberries, coffee grounds and resinous new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, fat and dense, with ripe, firm tannins from the skins and an additional dollop of astringency from the poorly-cured new wood. Pedestrian juice. 2018-2030? **78.**

**2012 Château Tournefeuille (Lalande de Pomerol)**

I am so used to being absolutely blown away by the quality of Château Tournefeuille particularly for its price- that I was surprised to see that both samples I had of this wine were a bit over-oaked and showing a lot of aggressive Taransaud spice tones. Underneath the wood spice is a very well-made wine, but this seems to be a decidedly oakier vintage of Tournefeuille- which, to my palate, is not a wine that is improved by more aggressive new wood. The nose is



quite marked by its oak spice, but also offers up a fine combination of black cherries, cassis, dark soil tones, coffee bean and tobacco smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite classic on the attack, with a good core, bright acids and a long, chewy finish that is just a touch dry from uncovered oak tannins. I get the sense that the barrels had already been bought and had to be used, but that the short crop of 2012 has resulted in a much more new oaky version of Tournefeuille. At least I hope this is the case and that 2012 is not the start of a decidedly more oaky version of what had been one of my favorite wines in Lalande de Pomerol! 2020-2040. **86-89** (depending on how well the wine eats up its spicy new oak).

#### **2012 Château La Vieille Cure (Fronsac)**

I used to buy Château La Vieille Cure for my cellar with some frequency in the decade of the 1980s, as this was really a lovely wine and a great value back then, but those days are long gone. The 2012 is a ripe, modern wine that the inherent restraint of the vintage helps a bit, as it offers up a nose of blackberries, cassis, coffee bean, chocolate and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and a touch heavy-handed, with solid depth, some tough, chewy tannins (probably derived equally from imperfectly ripened berries and too much new wood) and a bit of backend bitterness on the plodding finish. This is passable, but not a wine I would want in my own cellar. 2091-2040. **82.**

#### **2012 Château de Viaud (Lalande de Pomerol)**

The 2012 Château de Viaud is a touch pumped up in style, but its real Achilles' Heel is rather green tannins mixing it up with some uncovered wood tannins on the backend. The nose is not bad, delivering scents of plums, black cherries, lead pencil, dark chocolate and a fair bit of slightly resinous new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nicely balanced on the attack, with a sound core of fruit, but a chewy and tannic finish that shows signs of both uneven ripeness of the skins and a touch of raw wood tannins. Not a great wine. 2018-2030? **82.**

#### ***Pomerol***

*Several of the vignerons I spoke with in Pomerol echoed the sentiments of Baptiste Guinaudeau of Château Lafleur, who noted that "2012 is really an excellent merlot vintage in Pomerol, but the cabernet franc parcels suffered a bit more during the floraison and also did not benefit from perfect ripening prior to the onset of rains in late September." Consequently, several estates that often use a bit more cabernet franc in general, such as Vieux Château Certan, found themselves using a higher percentage of merlot in the grand vin this year. As I touched upon in the vintage overview, the clay soils of Pomerol did a better job of keeping some moisture during the drought period from mid-July to mid-September, so that vines did not shut down from hydric stress here (with the exception of some of the very young vines with less-developed root systems) and ripeness in general in this commune was surprisingly robust for this generally low octane vintage. There were plenty of Pomerols who reached fourteen percent alcohol or slightly higher (both Châteaux l'Évangile and Pétrus tipped the scales at 14.4 percent!), but the vintage is not marred by any signs of sur maturité that plagued the last three vintages here (typically, most of the wines from Pomerol are in the 13.5 percent range) and overall the wines of this commune are characterized by superb purity, velvety textures and really lovely structural elements for extended aging. Pomerol is clearly the most successful appellation in the 2012 vintage (though there was no reason that a great many more of the St. Émilions could not have matched the potential of the Pomerols in this vintage, except that the power consultants in that commune are not particularly adroit in handling vintages with any potential for elegance and classicism) and there are some absolutely stellar wines to be found*

*here this year. In particular, the 2012 wines owned or represented by the firm of J.P. Moueix are stellar and remind me very strongly of their superb roster in the 1985 vintage, as they are long on purity, balance and complex soil signatures. There are a great many wines amongst this roster that will make absolute cellar treasures ten or twenty years down the road! As these are the folks that sent Château Magdelaine to its grave, I was not really rooting for a great success here this year, but one cannot deny that the only mistake these defenders of classic claret made in the 2012 vintage was the decapitation of Magdelaine- as otherwise, their roster of Right Bank wines up and down their hierarchy was exceptionally successful and as brilliant as anyone's wines in this lovely Right Bank vintage. Beyond the Moueix roster, there are a large number of truly brilliant Pomerols in 2012, with the usual suspects such as Châteaux La Conseillante, l'Évangile, Lafleur, Pétrus, Le Pin and Vieux Château Certan all stunningly magical wines of great breed, complexity and potential for longevity. 2012 is not an overly powerful vintage in Pomerol (despite several wines topping fourteen percent alcohol), but rather a classically suave, pure and potentially velvety vintage of wines with impeccable balance for long-term aging. Where they will ultimately land in the hierarchy of great recent vintages in this commune remains to be seen, but I had a strong preference for most 2012s over their more powerful versions of 2009 or 2010, and this is clearly a great vintage for Pomerol.*



*The church in the center of Pomerol, as seen across the vines at Château Lafleur.*

### **2012 Château Beauregard**

The 2012 Château Beauregard is a dense and dull wine, offering up scents of black cherries, dark berries, espresso, cigar ash, dark soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and dull, with a heavy-handed, over-extracted personality, firm tannins and a slightly dry-edged, ham-fisted finish. Charmless and built to stay that way. 2022-2040. **81.**

### **2012 Château Bon Pasteur**

The style of the vintage has done a nice job of taming some of the over the top predilections of Monsieur Rolland with his home estate, and this is one of the better Bon Pasteurs I have tasted in several years. However, this should not be confused with an exciting or vibrant wine, as it is neither. The nose shows some nicely cool fruit tones in its blend of sappy black cherries, dark berries, chocolate, dark soil and plenty of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, but, with only modest mid-palate depth and some dry wood tannins currently sticking out uncovered on the reasonably long and chewy finish. There is enough stuffing here to eventually carry the wood, but the overall impression is of a wine that has been spit-polished into mediocrity and will never really provide a whole lot of enjoyment. Given how superb the raw materials were in Pomerol in 2012, this is a pretty poor effort, as the potential was clearly here to make a riveting example of Bon Pasteur. 2020-2040. **85.**

### **2012 Château Bourgneuf**

The 2012 Bourgneuf is a very good wine, and I was happy to have a couple of opportunities to look at samples, as my first example was not on form at all. However, once a pristine bottle was encountered at the Moueix offices, the quality here was quite clear. The fine and quite reserved nose offers up a blend of black cherries, tobacco, coffee bean, dark soil tones, blackberries, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and structured, with a fine core, ripe tannins and a long, chewy and ever so slightly, green finish. Clearly, the ripening here was not totally perfect, but there should be no issues with this wine ultimately, once it has had sufficient bottle age to blossom. 2022-2050. **88.**

### **2012 Château La Cabanne**

The 2012 Château La Cabanne is a bit dense in personality, but not bad in this vintage. The bouquet offers up a blend of black cherries, dark plums, chocolate, cigar smoke, soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chewy, with a rather old school density at the core, a bit of Le Gay-like inkiness, ripe, well-integrated tannins and fine length and grip. This is just a touch heavy-handed in style, but I like its potential complexity and its impressive depth. There used to be a lot more Pomerols made in this style back in the 1970s and early 1980s, and these types of wines have always been pretty good values and this seems likely to be the case with the 2012 La Cabanne. It is not the most graceful of young Pomerols, but it has plenty of character and should age quite well. 2022-2045+. **87+.**

### **2012 Château Certan de May**

I have been waiting for many years now for Certan de May to get over its one hundred percent new oak hangover and start making great wines again. If ever there was a *terroir* in Pomerol that screamed out for one wine barrels, it is Certan de May! In any event, the 2012 is not the vintage where the wine shakes off the shackles of a bit too much new wood, as the superb wine is a bit hindered at the present time by uncovered oak tannins on the backend. The superb and utterly classic nose offers up scents of black plums, dark soil tones, espresso, cigar smoke, fresh herbs and plenty of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and absolutely rock solid at the core, with fine focus and a slightly astringent backend

from wood tannins that are not (yet?) fully integrated into the body of the wine. There is probably sufficient stuffing here to eventually carry the wood, but the question has to be asked as to how much potential will be wasted in the effort to bury the lumber in the other constituent components of the wine? The one hundred percent new wood here really adds nothing positive to the equation, and in 2012, it has added an element of uncertainty to what could have been one of the most brilliant Pomerols of the vintage. 2022-2050. **87-91+?**

#### **2012 Château La Clemence**

The 2012 La Clemence is a modern-styled wine where the style of the vintage has worked to its advantage, so it is not too egregiously marked by its philosophy. The nose is a blend of black raspberries, black cherries, dark chocolate, cigar smoke, dark soil and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely textured on the attack, but with some uncovered wood tannins poking out and drying the finish. There is probably sufficient stuffing here to eventually eat the wood and the wine will be okay once this occurs. But, it is not the most interesting example. 2019-2030+? **85.**

#### **2012 Château Clos l'Église**

The 2012 Clos l'Église is a pretty sad example of a top vintage in Pomerol, as it offers up a sweet and syrupy nose of black raspberries, boysenberry, dark chocolate, cigar wrapper and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sweet on the attack, with a good core, a four-square personality and a completely astringent backend from poorly-cured, oak tannins. What can one say about a wine like this? 2018-2030. **79.**

#### **2012 Clos René**

I was very impressed with the 2012 Clos René, which is quite good in an old-fashioned sort of way, with the broad shoulders of yesteryear's Pomerols, and good depth and complexity. The fine nose wafts from the glass in a mix of plums, black cherries, dark chocolate, a touch of tobacco leaf, dark soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chewy and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, fine focus and very good length and grip on the youthfully complex finish. This is a lovely example of old school Pomerol and one of the sleepers of the 2012 vintage! 2022-2050. **88+.**

#### **2012 Château Clinet**

The 2012 Château Clinet is another of those modern wines that could not leave well enough alone and the team here seemingly sought to make a wine far more powerful than what the vintage's characteristics would have dictated on its own. The result is a well-made, thoroughly worked wine that ends up both dense and astringent on the palate- for no good reason other than the fact that someone here thinks every vintage should be shaped like the 2010s. The pumped up nose offers up scents of black cherries, blueberries, chocolate, cigar ash and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, dense and dry-edged on the backend from the malo having been done in raw new wood. The core is pretty good, without the dip in the mid-palate that is so much in evidence in a lot the modern wines in St. Émilion this year, but it is fairly astringent on its powerful and unbalanced finish. Probably there is enough stuffing here to eventually absorb the wood, but it will always be a ham-fisted and over-extracted wine of dubious charm. 2020-2040. **83.**

#### **2012 Duo de Conseillante**

The team at La Conseillante began picking their younger merlot on September 18<sup>th</sup>, the old vine merlot during the week of September 24<sup>th</sup> to October 1<sup>st</sup> (taking a few days off to let the rain work through) and the cabernet franc from October 5<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup>. The Duo de Conseillante this year is primarily merlot, with the blend ninety percent from that grape and ten percent

cabernet franc and the wine was raised in fifty percent new barrels. It is a lovely wine and superior to a great many *grands vins* on the Right Bank made under the auspices of the famous consultants! The bouquet is a fine blend of black raspberries, black cherries, cigar smoke, tobacco leaf, gravel and spicy oak. Today, the spicy oak is a tad strident on the nose, but there is plenty of stuffing to eventually absorb this- though, it strikes me that this wine is a perfect candidate for raising in one wine barrels, as I can see nothing the fifty percent new oak brings to the equation except the requirement to defer one's gratification while the oak integrates! On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very suave in profile, with good depth, modest tannins and a long, focused and velvety finish. A really lovely wine that really does justice to the concept of a second wine from a great estate. 2019-2035+. **89+**.

#### **2012 Château La Conseillante**

The new *chais* at Château La Conseillante has now been completed and it is a beautiful new addition to this property. Up above the *chais* are a pair of large, glass-enclosed tasting rooms that offer a beautiful view of surrounding Pomerol and the *graves* section of St. Émilion (with Cheval Blanc right across the stretch of vineyards that unfold below your feet). The new *chais* has clearly not gone to waste, as the team at La Conseillante has fashioned a brilliant utterly classic example of the 2012 vintage, offering up a pure and complex nose of black raspberries, black cherries, Cuban cigars, gravel, fresh herb tones, violets and a stylish base of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with excellent focus and balance, very fine-grained tannins and outstanding grip and nascent complexity on the very long, velvety finish. This wine reminds me quite a bit of the young 1985 La Conseillante- which is a vintage here that I adore and prefer to the more highly-praised 1982, 1989 and 1990 vintages at this great estate. A stunning wine in the making and clearly one of the greatest wines of the 2012 vintage. 2023-2065. **94+**.

#### **2012 Château La Croix de Gay**

The 2012 Château La Croix de Gay is not a successful wine in this vintage. The dull, borderline overripe and modern nose is a mélange of black raspberries, resin, dark chocolate, tar, coffee grounds and raw new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and patently out of balance, with no freshness, modest depth and a bit of resinous, new wood tannins marring the finish. The wine is reasonably light on its feet for all of this- thanks to the parameters of the vintage- but this is a leaden wine with no freshness or spark. Though, it does strike me that a beaver with a sweet tooth might really like the flavors. 2018-2030? **80**.

#### **2012 Château La Croix St. Georges**

To the best of my recollection, I have never before tasted Château La Croix St. Georges, and the 2012 will not have me running back any time soon for another sample. The dull and modern nose offers up a jammy blend of black raspberries, chocolate, incipient notes of coffee grounds and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and heavy-handed, with a pumped-up personality and plenty of drying wood tannins poking out uncovered on the chunky and moderately astringent finish. Dullesville. 2019-2030? **79**.

#### **2012 La Petite l'Église**

The 2012 La Petite l'Église, like nearly all of the wines in Monsieur Durantou's portfolio this year weighs in around fourteen percent alcohol and is really quite fresh in its fruit component and shows a bit more elegance from its Pomerol breeding than the wines from the satellite appellations, though it is still a pretty extracted wine. The nose is a fairly refined blend of black raspberries, black cherries, tobacco smoke, coffee bean, a bit of soil and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and shows pretty good acidity for the vintage,

with a deep and slightly dense core, ripe tannins and good length and grip on the ever so slightly, tarry finish. This is not bad in its more powerful style. 2020-2045. **87.**

#### **2012 Château l'Église-Clinet**

The 2012 Château l'Église-Clinet is a significant step up from the much more heady 2011 version, and while it is a wine that is really marked by its new wood, it also shows some lovely raw materials. The bouquet is a blend of black cherries, black raspberries, coffee bean, dark soil tones, a bit of chocolate and a very, very generous coating of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core of fruit, much more grace than the Petite l'Église this year, and good length and grip on the chewy and new oaky finish. There is only thirty percent Taransaud barrels used here (seventy percent of the wood in the cellars here hails from the *tonnelier* of Darnajou), but their spice element is certainly very present in the wine. This is a good wine in its guise, but not a style that really resonates with my palate the way the very best 2012 Pomerols do in spades. 2022-2045+. **89+.**

#### **2012 Château l'Évangile**

Monsieur Vazart, Technical Director at Château l'Évangile, reported that the harvest was perfect at the estate this year, with the picking teams starting to harvest grapes on September 22<sup>nd</sup> and finishing up on October 9<sup>th</sup>, with the grapes brought in with lovely ripeness. The wine is a gorgeous example of 2012 l'Évangile, tipping the scales at a ripe, but absolutely effortless 14.4 percent alcohol (the same level as at Pétrus this year) that exudes purity and precision. It is a far more classic example than either 2009 or 2010 at this address and, without question, is one of the best wines of the vintage. The bouquet is a superb blend of black cherries, black raspberries, cigar smoke, dark chocolate, violets, soil and a deft framing of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and vibrant, with a fine core of fruit, velvety tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and classy finish. The 2012 Château l'Évangile is an absolute classic in the making. 2023-2050+. **94.**

#### **2012 Château Fayat**

The 2012 Château Fayat is an okay wine, though not particularly complex. The bouquet is a blend of black cherries, plums, chocolate, a bit of soil and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and quite classically-balanced (no signs of pumping up with cellar parlor tricks), with a sound core of fruit, good focus and a bit of backend, chewy tannins on the fairly long, but simple finish. This is not bad and at least a fairly honest example of the vintage. 2020-2040. **85+.**

#### **2012 Château La Fleur de Gay**

The 2012 Château La Fleur de Gay is even more manipulated than the La Croix de Gay, and consequently, in this fine Pomerol vintage, this wine is even less successful than its stable-mate. The heavily-spoofed nose offers up kirsch-like notes of black cherries and black raspberry liqueur, pine resin, coffee grounds, mud and plenty of new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, dull and spiritry, with zero structure, zero acidity and an ugly, spit-polished and highly manipulated finish that sadly, is pretty long and increases the duration of the unpleasantness on the backend. The wine at least has pretty well-managed tannins, but it is most impressive in how bad it is this year. Tasted twice at two different tastings with equally abysmal and quite consistent results, so this really must be the wine this year. One wonders how they managed to get all this kirsch-like qualities to the fruit in a year where it was very hard to do a late harvest? 2015-2020. **70.**



### **2012 Château Gazin**

I am glad that I thought to ask for another sample of the 2012 Château Gazin at the UGC tasting, as the first wine was reductive and resinous, but the second bottle was in good shape and is really quite nice. The bouquet is a ripe blend of plums, black cherries, coffee bean, a nice touch of tobacco leaf, dark soil tones and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a good core, fine focus and a long, ripely tannic and classy finish. This will need some bottle age to fully blossom, but it will prove to be a good example of the vintage. 2022-2050. **89.**

### **2012 Château La Grave**

` The 2012 Château La Grave is one of the great bargains of the vintage and one of the best examples I can ever recall tasting from this old school Pomerol estate. The deep and quite classic nose wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of black cherries, plums, tobacco leaf, a touch of violet, gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke and a bit of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a very soil-driven personality, ripe tannins and a long, tangy finish. With a bit of bottle age, this will be a creamy and velvety Pomerol of lovely soil signature and impressive complexity. A ringing success and a wine not to be missed by lovers of old school Pomerol values! 2022-2050. **91+.**



*Baptiste Guinaudeau of Château Lafleur.*



### **2012 Château Hosanna**

The 2012 Château Hosanna is an excellent wine and one of the best vintages I have had the pleasure to taste from the old Certan-Giraud estate since its sale to the Moueix family. The very refined bouquet offers up scents of black raspberries, dark plums, tobacco leaf, a touch of fresh herbs, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very soil-driven in personality, with a superb core of fruit, ripe, harmonious tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. A beautiful bottle in the making. 2022-2050+. **93.**

### **2012 Les Pensées de Lafleur**

When the rains were forecast to arrive on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, the team at Lafleur decided to pick all of the merlot vines destined for the *grand vin* on the single day of September 21<sup>st</sup>, but, there was not sufficient time to harvest the merlot plots that are earmarked for Les Pensées de Lafleur, so these vines were harvested ten days later, after the rain had passed and the vines had had a chance to dry out. The wine has turned out very well indeed, offering up a cool fruit-toned bouquet of cassis, dark berry, currant leaf, cigar smoke, dark, gravelly soil tones, fresh herbs and a discreet base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and refined, with a lovely core of fruit, suave tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. A very fine bottle in the making. 2023-2050. **91+.**

### **2012 Château Lafleur**

The 2012 Château Lafleur has more merlot in it than is customary, as the merlot was perfect and the cabernet franc required quite a bit of selection to ensure that only the choicest vats were included in the *grand vin* this year. The resulting wine is exceptional, offering up a deep, complex and cool nose of cassis, dark berries, espresso, gravel, both currant and tobacco leaf and a very discreet base of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very suave on the attack, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent focus and nascent complexity, ripe, fine-grained tannins and outstanding length and grip on the soil-driven and stunning finish. Château Lafleur has been one of the most consistently excellent estates in Pomerol over the last four vintages, but though this is not as powerful as some of the previous wines, stylistically, the 2012 may well be my favorite here since the lovely 2008 (even though the exceptional 2010 Lafleur is probably the superior wine in absolute terms). This is one of the stars of this vintage! 2025-2075. **95.**

### **2012 Château Lafleur-Gazin**

The 2012 Château Lafleur-Gazin is one of the riper examples in Pomerol in this vintage and not as successful as some in hiding all of the personality traits that go along with high ripeness. The nose is also quite marked by its toasty new wood, as it offers up scents of black raspberries, black cherries, dark chocolate, nice herb tones, gravel, smoke and the aforementioned, generous veneer of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and creamy on the attack, with a sappy core, ripe tannins and just a bit of backend heat and imprecision on the finish. The wine is not bad, but it is not in the top division of 2012 Pomerols. 2020-2045+. **88.**

### **2012 Château Lafleur-Pétrus**

The 2012 Château Lafleur-Pétrus is a brilliant wine in the making. The deep, pure and utterly classic nose soars from the glass in a constellation of black cherries, black raspberries, dark chocolate, a beautifully complex base of soil, a touch of nutskin, coffee bean and a judicious base of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and potentially quite velvety, with lovely mid-palate depth, superb, nascent complexity, fine-grained tannins and

outstanding focus and balance on the very long, classy finish. An exceptional wine in the making. 2024-2060. **94.**

#### **2012 Château Latour à Pomerol**

The 2012 Château Latour à Pomerol is a great and utterly classic example of the vintage. The deep, refined and superb nose jumps from the glass in an elegant mélange of plums, pomegranate, cigar smoke, raspberries, gravelly soil tones, a touch of nutskin, tobacco leaf and a judicious base of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and structured, with a great core, excellent, youthful balance, sound acids and a very long, focused and ripely tannic finish. I love the nice, leafy, tobaccoey underpinning here that adds complexity to both the nose and palate and really harkens back to the great Pomerol vintages of the decade of the 1980s- and which has been lost in so many of the jammy and confectionary vintages of excessive ripeness in recent times. This is a great vintage of Latour à Pomerol! 2024-2060. **93.**

#### **2012 Fugue de Nénin**

I have liked the last few vintages from Château Nénin, but their 2012s are not really wines that capitalized on the outstanding potential of the vintage in Pomerol. The Fugue de Nénin is a very ripe and moderately disappointing wine on both the nose and palate. The ripe and slightly blowsy nose offers up scents of plums, black cherries, chocolate, smoke, soil and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch heady, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins and a slightly blowsy and imprecise finish from its ripeness. Not special (in a vintage where it should have been). 2019-2040. **86.**

#### **2012 Château Nénin**

The 2012 Château Nénin is again, quite ripe and muscular, as it offers up a deep and rather straightforward nose of black cherries, plums, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and a very generous serving of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, plump and a bit heady, with a fat core of fruit, firm, chewy tannins, good length and grip, but a slightly coarse and pedestrian finish. One really gets the sense that the alcohol got a bit too high here- taking away focus, breed and leeching more wood tannins into the wine than was necessary. Why did this wine end up the way it did, as its profile is more like a 2010 Pomerol than a 2012? 2021-2040+. **87.**

#### **2012 Le Jardin de Petit Village**

This was the first vintage I had ever tasted the second wine of Petite Village and the wine has turned out beautifully in this Right Bank vintage. The blend here is one hundred percent young vine merlot, for a section of the vineyard replanted in 2005 and was raised entirely in one wine barrels. This is a ripe and pure example of the vintage, coming in at fourteen percent alcohol and offering up a lovely and quite expressive bouquet of plums, black cherries, chocolate, a nice base of soil and base of spicy wood (as even one wine barrels still deliver plenty of signature- particularly if a percentage hails from Taransaud). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plump on the attack, with a fine core, lovely focus and a long, chewy finish. This has a fair bit of tannin to resolve, but it is beautifully balanced and will be a delightful wine with a bit of bottle age. One of the great bargains on the Right Bank in 2012! 2020-2045. **89.**

#### **2012 Château Petit Village**

The 2012 Château Petit Village is outstanding and one of the best young vintages from this estate that I have ever had the pleasure to taste. The deep, complex and structured nose wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, plums, tobacco smoke, dark soil tones, a touch of coffee bean and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently

complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and balance and a very long, moderately tannic finish. This is a lovely wine of perfect ripeness and lovely structure for long-term aging. Great juice and the most successful wine in the AXA stable in this vintage. 2020-2050. **92.**

#### **2012 Château Pétrus**

The 2012 Château Pétrus is a stunning young wine and everyone on the team seemed to be in a very happy mood with the quality of the vintage here. The tasting took place in the new *chais*, as the tasting room is still under construction, and the tasting was notable for the relaxed and friendly atmosphere- which was in notable contrast to the almost monastic, reverential mood of past years here (as well as at most of the other First Growths). The harvest at Pétrus started on September 24<sup>th</sup>, only to see the rain arrive the next day, which suspended the picking until the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, with all the remaining grapes being collected over the next week. The wine is cool, pure and wonderfully suave, which totally belies its 14.5 percent alcohol, as I would have guessed this wine to be in the 13.2 to 13.5 percent range. The bouquet is deep, primary and very refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of plums, black cherries, dark soil tones, cigar smoke, espresso and a gentle touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and potentially very velvety, with a superb core, ripe, seamless tannins and superb focus and grip on the very long and classic finish. This may evolve along the lines of the 1985 Pétrus, but it may possess even a bit more stuffing and land at a higher level when all is said and done. A superb wine. 2025-2075. **96.**

#### **2012 Château Le Pin**

Monsieur Thienpont had his two teenage sons assisting in hosting the tasting this year, as both boys were home from school for the Easter holidays, with the older son particularly vivacious and funny and livening up the banter around the table. The 2012 Château Le Pin was harvested between October 1<sup>st</sup> and October 3<sup>rd</sup>, and comes in at a very civilized 13.5 percent alcohol this year. The bouquet is deep and youthful, offering up a classy blend of black cherries, blackberries, cigar smoke, a touch of tobacco leaf, lovely soil tones and nutty, luxuriant new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and refined, with a fine core, ripe tannins, very good acidity and lovely length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. This will be a fine, fine vintage of Le Pin. 2022-2050. **93.**

#### **2012 Château Plince**

The 2012 Château Plince is a lovely, old school example of Pomerol that has really turned out splendidly well in this vintage. The deep, youthful and impressively complex nose wafts from the glass in a mix of plums, black cherries, dark chocolate, a touch of smokiness, hints of violet, dark soil tones and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and broad-shouldered, with a superb, plump core of fruit, excellent balance, ripe tannins and a long, chewy finish. This is one of the best young vintages of Plince I have ever had the pleasure to taste and this is another over-achiever in the roster of 2012 Pomerols and a wine for lovers of traditional claret to be on the search for when it is released. A great effort. 2022-2050. **91.**

#### **2012 Château La Pointe**

The 2012 Château La Pointe is a pretty heavy-handed and extracted example of the vintage, but at least this was not seemingly done by modern techniques. The deep nose offers up scents of black cherries, blackberries, chocolate, a bit of bonfire, coffee grounds and new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pretty four-square, with reasonable balance, chewy tannins and good length and grip on the fairly simple finish. This is okay, but not particularly light on its feet. 2020-2040. **82.**

## **2012 Château Providence**

The 2012 Providence is a very good example of the vintage, but it does not seem to have quite the same effortless mid-palate concentration of the best wines of the vintage and probably did not ripen quite as well as the very top Pomerols in this year. The nose is currently quite marked by its spicy new wood, but not excessively so, as it offers up scents of black raspberries, pomegranate, tobacco leaf, espresso, dark soil and aforementioned cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and impressively silky on the attack, with a good, but not great core, fine focus and a long, nascently complex and ripely tannic finish. The wood is subsumed nicely on both the nose and palate here once the wine has sat in the glass for a while and I have no doubts that it will integrate smoothly with bottle age. This is a very, very good wine, but not quite in the league of the best Pomerols in 2012. 2022-2050+. **92.**

## **2012 Château Rouget**

The 2012 Rouget is a very heavily-oaked wine and is quite scarred by its spicy, Taransaud cooperage, which is too bad, as there is a pretty good wine underneath the *pain épice*. The nose offers up, beyond the aggressive new oak spice, scents of black cherries, black raspberries, dark chocolate, tobacco and soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely textured on the attack, with a good core and a long, chewy finish where the oak tannins are nicely integrated into the body of the wine and the grip and nascent complexity are pretty good. Will this wine ever be able to shake off the veneer of Taransaud seasoning, or will it always be captive to the aggressive oak spice of this cooper? It is a pity about the poor choice of wood, as there is really a lovely wine under the aggressive oak spice. 2020-2045. **86+?**

## **2012 Château Tour Maillet**

The 2012 Tour Maillet is a modern wine that is, again, reasonably well-balanced by the stylistic parameters of the vintage. The nose is a blend of black raspberries and cherries, dark chocolate, cigar smoke and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch pumped up on the attack, with a chunky personality, but the substantial tannins nicely integrated on the fairly long finish. It is a good example of its genre, if not a particularly complex wine. 2018-2030+. **85.**

## **2012 Château Trotanoy**

This is one of the finest young vintages of Château Trotanoy I have ever had the pleasure to taste. The wine is deep, pure and utterly classic on both the nose and palate. The sensational bouquet offers up a stunning array of plums, mulberries, tobacco leaf, coffee, a brilliantly complex base of soil, cigar smoke, violets and a lovely base of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a very poised and soil-driven personality, laser-like focus, fine-grained and substantial tannins and stunning length and grip on the youthful and endless finish. This is just a brilliant young Trotanoy! 2025-2075. **96.**

## **2012 Vieux Château Certan**

Vieux Château Certan has made one of the great wines of the 2012 vintage (no surprise here, as the last swing and a miss here probably dates back to the early 1940s!) and it is destined to be a legendary VCC as the years unfold. The *cépages* is quite merlot-dominated this year, as Monsieur Thienpont noted that it was particularly fine in this vintage, and the blend is eighty-seven percent merlot, twelve percent cabernet franc and one percent cabernet sauvignon (from the great old vines that still remain here from that variety). Final analysis had not been completed, but the Thienponts expect the wine to come in between 13.4 and 13.5 percent in this vintage. As Alexandre Thienpont commented, “for us, 2012 is very similar to 1985 here at Vieux Château Certan and we expect the new vintage to age very similarly to the ’85.” Harvest began

here on October 1<sup>st</sup>, so the teams waited for the late September rain to work through before starting to pick. The resulting wine is stunning, offering up a beautiful and utterly classic nose of cassis, dark berries, espresso, cigar smoke, gravel, tobacco leaf and a judicious base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows excellent mid-palate depth, with a supremely elegant profile, suave tannins, bright acids for the vintage and a very long, complex and classy finish. This is not as powerful as the 2005 here, but it is very close in absolute quality in its more elegant and classic style. Just a superb wine. 2022-2050. **94+**.

### **2012 Château Vray Croix de Gay**

I had never tasted any examples of Vray Croix de Gay and the 2012 was not a lot of inspiration to search out other vintages. This is a modern, pumped up and resinous wine, offering up a nose of black raspberries, black cherries, chocolate, pine resin, dark soil and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, flat and dull, with no shape or focus, moderate core and a long, dry and woody finish. Unpleasant juice. 2020-2040. **79**.

### ***St. Émilion***

*The commune of St. Émilion was controversy central at the time of my visit here during the first two weeks of April. The classification of estates here, which takes place every ten years, was particularly contentious this year, with the promotion of both Angélus and Pavie to the very top division, or Premier Grand Cru Classé “A” alongside of Ausone and Cheval Blanc, and a host of other estates being promoted either to Premier Grand Cru Classé “B” or attaining Grand Cru status (the next level down) for the first time. The promotions have increased the extent of vineyard land classified as Grand Cru by more than thirty percent, and there have been a great many eyebrows raised around the globe about the new classifications, as there seem to have been some very curious decisions rendered. I for one am quite intrigued about who sits on the committee who undertakes these decisions and what exactly are their criteria for their evaluations, and hope to have time to delve into this aspect of the controversy in depth in the coming months, once I have some time free to do a bit of research. In any event, the new classifications are still unofficial, as there is legal action afoot to try and overturn them, and the annual Premier Grand Cru Classé “B” tasting, which is usually organized in conjunction with the UGC tasting of the wines from the commune and neighboring Pomerol was not held this year, so my depth of notes on the wines from St. Émilion are not as broad as is customary.*

*On top of all the controversy surrounding the new classifications, the communal boundaries are also chockfull of rumors concerning the eventual fate of Château Figeac, as serious changes have swept through this estate in the last few months and there are many Figeac fans that feel that the days are numbered when this great property’s wines can still be listed amongst the most classically-styled clarets on either side of the Gironde. Long-time director of the property, Eric d’Aramon (who is the son-in-law of the late Thierry Manoncourt) has been ousted from his position at the estate (rumor has it, primarily at the displeasure of his mother-in-law, Marie-France Manoncourt) and retired to his property in Entre-Deux-Mers, and the estate is now being run by Co-Gérants, Jean-Valmy Nicolas (who has come over from Château La Conseillante) and Autance Manoncourt (sister-in-law of Monsieur d’Aramon). The day to day direction of the estate is now in the hands of CEO Frédéric Freye, who had been the vineyard manager here for the last eight years and has been promoted. Most controversially- at least to legions of long-time Figeac lovers- was the announcement that Michel Rolland has been retained as a consultant for the property, ousting long-time Figeac consultant, Gilles Pauquet*

*(whose client list includes other traditionalists on the Right Bank such as La Conseillante, Canon and Cheval Blanc).*

*There has been a storm of angst whirling about the wine world about the appointment of M. Rolland as consultant at Figeac, which allegedly has caught Madame Marie-France Manoncourt very much by surprise, and Monsieur Freye was ready with plenty of information about the new consulting partnership when we arrived at the property to taste the 2012 Figeac in early April. According to Monsieur Freye, “Figeac’s style will not change under Michel Rolland, and he has been given his greatest task to date in trying to craft a great wine of elegance at Figeac.” Monsieur Freye reports that the Rolland contract is for only for the 2013 vintage, and assessment of the collaboration will be undertaken after this wine is finished, and he insists that the overall goal here is to make Figeac even greater than it has been in the past, but not to change its inherent style. Whether or not Monsieur Rolland will be up to this challenge- I have my extreme doubts on this count- is a question that will be answered over the coming year, but in any event, Monsieur Rolland also took part in the decision-making on the final blend of the 2012 Figeac (which happens to be outstanding and still very classical in style). Privately, many Bordeaux insiders expect the Manoncourt family to sell the property in the near future, despite the firm statements to the contrary by the family.*

*Figeac has often been cited of late as a poster child for Bordeaux pricing run amok, as the estate raised the price of its 2009 by a very large percentage and alienated both long-time fans of the estate and the Bordeaux marketplace, which has had a difficult time selling through their allocations of Figeac since the stiff increase in price. To be fair to Monsieur d’Aramon, under whose watch the price was raised so dramatically, he was allegedly told that one of the primary criteria for consideration for promotion from Premier Grand Cru Classé “B” status into the rarefied air of “A” status was price, and at that time, Figeac did not sell for a high enough price to even be considered for promotion. Hence, the very obvious impetus to raise the price dramatically with the 2009 Figeac, as the Manoncourt family has long sought to have Figeac ranked at the same level as Cheval Blanc and Ausone and one has to speculate that the fact that Figeac was once again jilted from promotion (while a couple of rather surprising estates were given the promotion and whose only real qualification for this seems to be their Parker points and attendant overly-high price tags) was the primary impetus behind all the changes at the estate. Whether or not the 2012 Figeac will indeed prove to be the last great, classic wine produced at this great estate remains to be seen, but at least the wine has turned out splendidly in this fine Right Bank vintage.*

*As for the other wines in the commune, the results are pretty predictable. The estates that employ fancy consultants to make big, bold, modern wines have produced wines that are certainly far more restrained than was the case in 2009, 2010 and 2011, but, at least to my palate, they are no more successful at these lower octane levels than they were at the very high alcohol levels found amongst this stable in the three previous vintages. 2012 was certainly not a vintage on either side of the Gironde to make wines by one’s “customary recipe”, and the modernists have blown the opportunity to really make great wines in 2012. As I noted in the vintage introductory section, the modernists were far more successful as a group in 2008 than they have been in 2012, as many of their new wines lack mid-palate depth, are flat and dull, and even where the wood tannins are well-integrated, the wines lack vibrancy, complexity and lift.*

*The real action in St. Émilion is with the shrinking number of traditionalists here, who have as a group made truly exceptional and classic wines that should age splendidly well and are amongst the finest wines to be found in the entire vintage. 2012 is also noteworthy as the first vintage without a Château Magdelaine, as the Moueix family petitioned the AOC to blend this estate into neighboring Bélair-Monange, and the request was granted immediately and Magdelaine is no longer. It is a pity, as the last three previous vintages in St. Émilion have been far from classic years for the wines from the commune, and it is sad to think that the last three vintages of Magdelaine will have to originate in such ripe and buxom years, for the superb raw materials of 2012 would have clearly produced an absolutely magical Magdelaine. Anyway, that is St. Émilion today- about as maddening, disappointing and controversial as Washington, DC these days at budget time...*

### **2012 Le Carillon d'Angélus**

The second wine of Château Angélus is strange, underripe and very resinous in 2012, offering up an aromatic blend of dark berries, herb tones, tar, some overt vegetal nuances and plenty of raw, spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, green and angular, with a modest core and a bit of wood tannin poking out on the focused finish. At least we know into which bottling all the unevenly ripe berries went! At least this green and unpleasant wine is fairly well-balanced and will be able to support its new wood. Some wine to foist on fans of the estate to celebrate a promotion in the classification! 2020-2040. **79.**

### **2012 Château Angélus**

I had pretty high hopes for the 2012 Château Angélus, as the 2008 here has proven to be one of my absolute favorite vintages at this estate, but the 2012 is not cut from the same cloth and is nowhere near as successful as that wine. The wine is a blend of fifty-five percent merlot and forty-five percent cabernet franc this year and tips the scales at 13.6 percent alcohol. The bouquet is ripe and fairly extracted in personality, offering up scents of black cherries, blackberries, espresso, dark soil, smoke and plenty of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and shows a bit of backend heat, with stern, tough tannins, good focus and balance and a long, heavy-handed finish. All the potential greatness of the 2012 vintage has been wasted at Château Angélus this year, as they seemingly have sought to cancel out the elegance of the vintage with plenty of extraction. The wine is okay, but hardly a great wine and comparing this to the stunning 2012 Figeac really makes a mockery of the new classification, if this wine is supposed to be a cut above Figeac! 2022-2050. **88.**

### **2012 La Chapelle d'Ausone**

The 2012 La Chapelle d'Ausone is a good wine that will make friends early, but really will be better if given a few years of bottle age to develop some secondary layers of complexity. The nose is a stylish blend of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of tobacco leaf, cigar smoke, soil and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and shows pretty good acidity for the vintage here (seemingly more than the *grand vin* at this stage), with a solid core, modest tannins and good length on the focused and quite well-balanced, suave finish. A very pretty wine. 2018-2035. **89.**

### **2012 Château Ausone**

The 2012 Château Ausone is a very good wine, but one can see that the proclivity here these days to harvest late has not been a ready path to capture all of the potential of this superb Right Bank vintage. The Ausone team did not even get started picking their merlot until October 2<sup>nd</sup> (in Château Simard) and finished up bringing in the last of the cabernet franc from their



various vineyard holdings on October 22<sup>nd</sup>. Overall, the entire portfolio shows just a touch easy-going as a result, as the perfect tension of balance in the Right Bank wines picked earlier is missing here. That said, the 2012 Ausone is not a bad wine by any means, as it offers up notes of black cherries, plums, coffee bean, tobacco leaf, complex soil tones, smoke and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and classy on the attack, with good, but not great depth at the core, a very luxurious palate impression and silky tannins evident on the velvety and laid back finish. One would probably have seen more grip and vibrancy if the fruit had been gathered a bit earlier, but perhaps the really chalky soils here were more difficult to manage during the drought and this was the best course to take. In any event, the 2012 Ausone a very pretty wine that will drink well fairly young for this cru, but, will not vie with the best wines of the Right Bank for top honors in this vintage. 2020-2045+. **91+**.

#### **2012 Château Balestard la Tonnelle**

The 2012 Château Balestard la Tonnelle is a bit too new oaky for my tastes, but it is well-balanced and certainly not over the top in this fine Right Bank vintage. The bouquet is a blend of sappy black cherries and pomegranate, cigar smoke and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chewy, with a plump core of fruit, well-measured ripeness and good length and grip on the fairly tannic finish. This is not overly complex, but offers up nice balance and plenty of stuffing and is really a pretty good result in 2012. 2019-2040. **88**.

#### **2012 Château Barde-Haut**

Château Barde-Haut is one of the newly-promoted estates to Grand Cru Classé (if the classification does not get overturned in the courts) and for the life of me, based on this 2012, I cannot understand how they were promoted. This wine is new oaky and very simple (though, at least not badly balanced), offering up scents of sappy black cherries and blackberries, coffee bean, a touch of dark soil and plenty of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and four-square, with a dip in the mid-palate and a dry-edged finish brought about by some raw oak tannins. Probably there is enough stuffing here (despite the hole in the mid-palate) to eventually absorb the wood tannins, but the wine is not ever going to offer complexity or charm. 2018-2035? **80**.

#### **2012 Château Beau-Séjour Bécot**

The 2012 Beau-Séjour Bécot is a very dull and dreary wine, offering up a modern bouquet of black cherries, plums, chocolate, Cuban cigars, damp soil and spicy, Taransaud oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plump on the attack, with very little complexity, modest depth and a dry-edged, chewy finish from new wood on the fairly long backend. At least the wine is reasonably long and shows good grip, but it is rather heavy-handed and flat as a pancake and is quite ham-fisted this year. 2018-2030+? **83**.

#### **2012 Château Bélair-Monange**

The 2012 Château Bélair-Monange, with the ghost of Magdelaine now safely incorporated within, is a brilliant young wine and clearly the finest yet produced since the Moueix family purchased this great old estate. The stunning bouquet soars from the glass in a constellation of black cherries, pomegranate, cigar smoke, a brilliantly complex base of soil, fresh herb tones, menthol and a judicious base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very transparent, with a rock solid core of fruit, laser-like focus and stunning backend energy and great length and grip on the seamless and youthful finish. Why one great wine is better than two great wines is simply a mystery to me (would Romanée-Conti being blended into La Tâche really be an improvement on the present situation?), but the *Bordelais* tend to think in terms of brands, rather than of wines and *terroirs*, so I suppose the only real

surprise is that the Moueix family waited as long as they did to finish off Magdelaine after they purchased Bélair. Happily, at least the new hybrid wine is absolutely stunning in 2012! 2025-2075. **95+**.

### **2012 Château Berliquet**

The 2012 Château Berliquet is a modern wine that shows a bit of restraint from the vintage's characteristics on the nose, but the palate is dense and dry-edged on the backend. The bouquet is a blend of black cherries, black raspberries, coffee grounds and spicy, resinous new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really quite dull and dense, with an unappetizing, over-extracted finish that closes with some uncovered oak tannins and no spark or bounce. 2018-2030. **81**.

### **2012 Clos Canon**

The 2012 Clos Canon is comprised of a blend of eighty-five percent merlot and fifteen percent cabernet franc, was raised in twenty percent new wood and saw approximately thirty percent of the blend's malo done in barrel this year. It really is an exceptionally fine second wine, wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of black cherries, dark plums, menthol, cigar smoke, dark soil and just a touch of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and classy, with a very good core, lovely focus and balance and a long classy finish that closes with finely-grained tannins and lovely signature of soil. The new addition of vineyards here have really raised the level of this wine and this is now one of the best values to be found in the commune of St. Émilion. Very impressive! 2020-2040+. **90**.

### **2012 Château Canon**

Château Canon is one of the top wines yet again in St. Émilion in the 2012 vintage, despite the percentage of the blend undergoing malo in barrel creeping up to thirty percent in this vintage (it was about twenty-five percent in 2010- though I am not sure when this practice started here). The *cépages* this year is seventy percent merlot and thirty percent cabernet franc, the alcohol content is fourteen percent, and the wine was raised in eighty percent new wood. The harvest started here on October 3<sup>rd</sup> for the merlot, and was completed by October 16<sup>th</sup> for the last of the cabernet franc. The superb nose offers up a ripe and very pure blend of blackberries, black cherries, menthol, Cuban tobacco, a great base of soil, espresso and a stylish base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, excellent focus and balance and a long, nascently complex and very, very classy finish. A beautiful Canon in the making. 2025-2070. **93+**.

### **2012 Château Canon-la-Gaffelière**

The 2012 Château Canon-la-Gaffelière is a slick and modern wine that shows a bit of greenness from uneven ripening and is another of those wines where the malo in barrel this year has pumped up the attack a bit at the same time it has thinned out the mid-palate. The nose is a polished blend of black cherries, mocha, cigar smoke, a touch of green herbs and plenty of raw, Taransaud-inspired wood spice. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and almost plush on the attack, with a hole in the mid-palate and charmless finish that shows both uneven ripeness and uncovered oak tannins. Not too inspiring. 2018-2030+? **83**.

### **2012 Château Cap de Mourlin**

The 2012 Cap de Mourlin was one of the most modern wines I tasted at the UGC tasting this year, offering up a nose of mocha, black cherries, boysenberry and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very extracted, with a flat, four-square personality and a long, chewy finish. Today, the wine's wood tannins are not fully covered on the backend, but there is probably the stuffing here to eventually do so. But, out of the blocks the wine is really

quite raw, and no matter how well the fruit eventually covers the oak tannins, there is always going to be a shortage of complexity and charm. Ham-fisted, over-extracted juice, I would expect the shelf life of this wine to be quite short. 2017-2025+? **79.**

#### **2012 Le Petit Cheval**

The 2012 Le Petit Cheval is really exceptional this year, jumping from the glass in a beautiful and complex blaze of cassis, dark berries, menthol, tobacco leaf, cigar ash, dark soil, herb tones and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and bright, with a fine core, ripe, velvety tannins and a long, primary and very classy finish. The *cépages* in 2012 is seventy-five percent cabernet franc and twenty-five percent merlot- proving that not all cabernet franc really fared poorly in this vintage! The 2012 Le Petit Cheval is quite reminiscent of several very good vintages of Cheval Blanc of yesteryear- such as the underrated 1981- and it is a very, very impressive second wine. 2020-2050. **90+.**

#### **2012 Château Cheval Blanc**

The *grand vin* here this year is comprised of a blend of fifty-four percent merlot and forty-six percent cabernet franc and was produced from yields of thirty-one hectoliters per hectare. It is a great Cheval Blanc in the making, soaring from the glass in a classic blend of dark berries, mulberries, cigar smoke, espresso, lovely, cabernet franc-derived herb tones, menthol and a stylish base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and seamless, with a youthful personality, superb focus and balance, a fair bit of tannin and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and very, very promising finish. There was a pretty wide variety of samples of this wine on display at the château on the damp morning in early April when the estate was playing open house to visiting journalists (I overheard Michel Bettane comment that “every single bottle is different”), and one had to hunt around a bit to find a bottle that was not totally shut down, but the samples that were open for inspection clearly indicated that this will be a great, great vintage of Cheval Blanc. 2025-2075. **95+.**

#### **2012 Château Clos Fourtet**

The 2012 Château Clos Fourtet is a modern wine that shows a bit of restraint on the nose from the shape of the vintage, as it offers up scents of black cherries, pomegranate, coffee bean, a bit of pine resin and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and suave on the attack, with a good core, sound focus and just a bit of backend rigidity from all the new oak, but with the tannins reasonably well-integrated on the finish. This is not too bad in its modern *genre*. 2018-2030+. **86.**

#### **2012 Clos des Jacobins**

This wine used to be okay in the decade of the 1980s- chunky, but plush and honest in style, but it has been a modern wine for quite some time now and it is not particularly riveting in 2012. The pumped up nose offers up a dull blend of black cherries, blackberries, coffee grounds, damp soil and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, simple and dense, with no lift or spark, firm, but at least, well-integrated tannins and just a touch of drying on the backend. This is relatively restrained because of the vintage’s characteristics, but one should not confuse this with interesting or complex, as this wine is simple in the extreme. 2020-2035. **83.**

#### **2012 Château Corbin**

The 2012 Château Corbin is a superb wine and very classic in profile, as Annabelle Bardinet Cruse moved briskly to bring in all of her grapes in the first week of October, with the grapes “beautifully ripe and with the picking teams just one step ahead of the rot that was threatening the crop at this time.” The yields were only thirty seven hectoliters per hectare this year, due to the difficult flowering, but the wine that has been produced here is one of the stars of

the commune. The 2012 Château Corbin is an absolute classic, comprised of a blend of ninety percent merlot and ten percent cabernet franc and was raised in forty percent new wood this year. The alcohol is around 13.2 percent alcohol, which, to my palate is a welcome respite to the mid fourteens here of the last couple of vintages (I got the alcohol level wrong on the 2011 Corbin, which actually finished up at 14.6 percent- I had reported it to be a full degree lower in alcohol last year.) The deep, nascently complex and utterly pure nose wafts from the glass in a constellation of black cherries, dark plum, coffee bean, cigar smoke, a lovely base of soil, a touch of tobacco leaf and a discreet base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and vibrant, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, classy and tangy finish. Madame Bardinet Cruse will be the first one to tell you that the *terroir* at Corbin is not one of the great *terroirs* in St. Émilion, but she is clearly fashioning one of the best wines in the appellation and it is rather a joke to see some of the properties promoted recently here, while Corbin remains ranked simply as a Grand Cru Classé. In any event, it is great for savvy Bordeaux lovers today, as it allows us to buy one of the best-made wines on the Right Bank at prices that harken back to the golden age of the Bordeaux market in the decade of the 1980s. 2020-2040+. **91+**.

#### **2012 Château La Couspade**

The 2012 Château La Couspade is a modern and simple wine, offering up a bouquet of mocha, boysenberry, black cherries, coffee bean and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and low acid, with a dip in the mid-palate and a chewy, flat finish. Dullesville. 2018-2030+? **82**.

#### **2012 Château Dassault**

The Château Dassault in 2012 is another wine where Mother Nature has stepped in and blocked some propensity to excess, with the resulting wine a bit better than has been the case in the past few years here. The modern nose is a blend of black cherries, dark berries, Cuban cigars, a touch of dark soil and plenty of spicy, nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite modern in personality, but with good balance, a solid core and a long, ripely tannic finish. This is one 2012 from the modern school that harkens back a bit to many of the successful modern St. Émilions from the 2008 vintage, and though this is not a style that really moves me, the 2012 Dassault is a wine that I would be perfectly willing to drink five to seven years down the road, once it has had a chance to soften. 2017-2030+. **87**.

#### **2012 Château La Dominique**

The 2012 Château La Dominique is bizarrely overripe for the vintage, offering up a liqueur-like nose of framboise, kirsch, Cuban tobacco, coffee bean and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, simple and shows absolutely no soil tones, with some green tannins from uneven ripening and also a bit of backend, uncovered oak tannin. At least the finish is not short, but this wine has been neutered. How the team here got such an overripe personality in a vintage with such pressures from rot is really a bit of a mystery to me, but maybe they let the grapes “raisin” a bit on the vine. A singular expression of the 2012 vintage and not a wine I would have any interest in crossing paths with again, as once was enough. 2018-2030+? **83**.

#### **2012 Château Le Dome**

The 2012 Le Dome is an over-extracted and exceedingly uninteresting example of the vintage. The brooding nose offers up scents of black cherries, dark berries, pine resin, chocolate and raw oak. On the palate the wine is dense, full-bodied and plodding, with a good core, a chunky personality and a dry and astringent finish from poorly-executed new wood. Nothing here of merit- just a dull, heavy-handed and leaden wine. 2020-2040. **77**.

### **2012 Château de Ferrande**

The 2012 Château de Ferrande is comprised of eighty-five percent merlot, ten percent cabernet franc and five percent cabernet sauvignon. It was raised in two-thirds new wood, but its malo was broken up a bit, with one-third done in new barrels, one-third in older wood and one-third in stainless steel. The wine is modern in aromatic profile, but with the moderating influence of the vintage used to good effect, as the wine delivers scents of plums, black cherries, chocolate, cigar smoke and plenty of nutty, spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a creamy core and good length and grip on the dry-edged finish. This has enough stuffing to carry its two-thirds new wood, but it would have been more interesting without having to strain under so much lumber. 2020-2040. **86.**

### **2012 Château Figeac**

Whatever eventually happens at Château Figeac, at least we have the stunning and utterly classic 2012 to latch onto for our cellars! This is a superb example of the vintage that fully demonstrates that the vintage was every bit as fine in St. Émilion as it was in Pomerol, and those who missed in the former commune did so due to their own methodology, rather than any inherent limitations in the vintage. The 2012 Figeac is comprised of a blend of forty percent each merlot and cabernet sauvignon (those who would rip out the cabernet sauvignon here are simply out of their minds- and there are dozens of folks in Bordeaux that would immediately do so if they had control of this great estate- as this is one of the defining elements of Figeac that sets it apart and above from its neighbors!) and twenty percent cabernet franc. As has been the case since the 1970 vintage, the wine was raised in one hundred percent new wood. The bouquet is deep, complex, pure and utterly classic, jumping from the glass in a refined mix of black cherries, dark berries, Cuban cigars, a lovely base of gravelly soil tones, a touch of violet and a very well done base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and beautifully structured, with a rock solid core, good acidity, refined, suave tannins (predominantly from the cabernet sauvignon one would expect) and excellent length and grip on the focused and superb finish. If this is the swan song for classic Figeac, it is one hell of a wine to go out with! 2022-2055+. **94.**

### **2012 Château de Fonbel**

The sample of the 2012 Château de Fonbel was quite reduced when I tasted it, and as we had arrived late to our appointment at Château Ausone, it seemed like it would be quite rude to ask to see another sample when another group was due any second to taste. So, I have not proper note on this wine, but it was long and showed good grip underneath the reduction and is probably at least quite good in this vintage.

### **2012 Château Fonplégade**

Château Fonplégade is located on the Côtes section of St. Émilion, just down the hill from Bélair-Monange, and this should be one of the most serious *terroirs* in the commune. Sadly, if this is the case, it is very well hidden in this abysmal 2012. The wine offers up a totally pumped up and spoofed nose of black raspberry, black cherry, coffee bean, damp soil and raw, resinous oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly elegant on the attack, but totally dry and eviscerated from sloppy wood management from the mid-palate back to the totally astringent finish. Unfortunately, the backend is not short, which just prolongs the unpleasantness of this totally over-oaked wine. Someone else ought to be running this estate, as the current team is clearly clueless. I really have a hard time imagining this wine doing anything but withering under the onslaught of its astringency. This is emphatically not a good wine. ???

**74.**

### **2012 Château Fonroque**

The 2012 Château Fonroque is a bit too new oaky for its own good, but has a nice base of raw materials under the wood. The nose offers up scents of black cherries, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, espresso and spicy, slightly resinous new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly shapely on the attack, with a good core, sound acids, but a bit of dry-edged tannin detracting from the overall sense of balance on the reasonably long finish. With less new wood (or less Taransaud), this would be a really good wine, rather than just solid. 2020-2040. **86.**

### **2012 Château Franc Mayne**

The 2012 Château Franc Mayne is one of the least successful, modern wines I tasted on this trip. The over the top nose is a blend of framboise, coffee grounds, a touch of bug spray and raw new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and plump on the attack, with a hole in the mid-palate and a moderately astringent, short and extremely simple finish. I cannot imagine a time when this will ever be even remotely interesting to drink. ??? **64.**

### **2012 Château La Gaffelière**

The 2012 Château La Gaffelière is really very good and one of the best examples I have tasted from this estate in quite some time. The wine is still cut from a modernist cloth, but the restraint of the vintage has really done a nice job of giving this wine shape and bounce. The nose is deep and quite pure in its blend of black cherries, plums, cocoa, cigar smoke, soil and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a good core, ripe tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and velvety finish. This is a lovely example of the vintage. 2021-2040+. **89.**

### **2012 Château Grand Corbin**

The 2012 Grand Corbin is comprised of eighty percent merlot, fifteen percent cabernet franc and five percent cabernet sauvignon and was raised in a fifty-fifty combination of new and one wine barrels- probably with most hailing from Taransaud based on the amount of wood spice here. The nose is modern, but a bit restrained by the shape of the vintage, offering up scents of black cherries, coffee bean, dark soil and the aforementioned spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, dense and extracted, with a good core, firm tannins and a bit of a dry edge from the Taransaud on the finish. This is okay, but hardly special. 2020-2040. **85.**

### **2012 Château Grand Corbin-Despagne**

The 2012 Château Grand Corbin-Despagne is a modern and dismal wine. The nose is a pumped up mix of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, tobacco leaf, dark soil and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off a good attack, but withers from the mid-palate back with uncovered wood tannins combined with some chewy skin tannins. The overall effect is a completely astringent finish that shows little hope of resolution. It may have a very brief window where the tannins back off enough to make the wine potable, but this will probably be short-lived, as most of the fruit will be sacrificed to the tannins. 2018-2025+? **73.**

### **2012 Château Grand Corbin-Manuel**

The 2012 Château Grand Corbin-Manuel is a bit better than the Grand Corbin-Despagne, but it is still a pretty modest wine that shows some signs of uneven ripeness. The bouquet is a blend of black cherries, woodsmoke, herbs, tobacco leaf, a bit of bell pepper and raw new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, fairly traditional in style and shape and slightly dry on the backend from uncovered oak tannins. This is a fairly dull wine, but at least it is not spoofulated. 2019-2030+? **83+.**

### **2012 Château Grand-Mayne**

The modern side of the 2012 Château Grand-Mayne has at least been reined-in a bit by the style of the vintage, but this is not a special wine by any stretch of the imagination. The nose is a predictable blend of mocha, boysenberry, black cherries, Cuban cigars, some green tones from uneven ripeness and raw new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and chocolaty, with moderate depth and a short, dry-edged and simple finish. 2018-2030+. **81.**

### **2012 Château Haut Simard**

I cannot recall ever having tasted a better young vintage of Haut Simard than the 2012, which really showed very well indeed. The nose is deep and quite impressive, offering up scents of black cherries, dark berries, espresso, cigar smoke, a nice base of soil, herbs and just a touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and elegant, with a good core, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the focused and suave finish. The grip here seems even better today than the Chapelle d'Ausone or the *grand vin*! A lovely result and one of the sleepers of the vintage. 2017-2035. **90+.**

### **2012 Château Le Jurat**

This is a Grand Cru owned by Monsieur Bouärd of Angélus fame and it is not too bad in 2012. The bouquet is a blend of black cherries, cassis, dark soil tones, espresso and cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and a bit dense from extraction, with ripe tannins, good focus and a chewy backend that shows off a bit of uncovered Taransaud oak spice. It is a bit dense and worked, but for all of that, it is pretty well-balanced and reasonably tasty in this slightly forced style. Perfectly respectable, if unexciting. 2020-2040. **85+.**

### **2012 Château Larcis Ducasse**

The 2012 Château Larcis Ducasse is another of those modern wines where the style of the vintage has acted as a bit of a brake on the customary predilections of the team here. The nose is a touch restrained in its modern mix of boysenberry, chocolate, a bit of pine resin, dark soil and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and chewy, with a fairly good core, some wood tannins sticking out currently on the finish, but enough stuffing to eventually absorb them. This okay, and on a desert island, once might be tempted to pull a cork after it has had five or six years of bottle age. 2018-2030+? **84.**

### **2012 Château Larmande**

The 2012 Larmande displays a bit of uneven ripeness on both the nose and palate, and though it is a modern wine, the restraint of the vintage has helped it out a bit this year. The bouquet is a blend of black cherries, Cuban cigars, espresso, dark soil, some herb tones and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is fullish and lacking in complexity, but not too bad in terms of balance, with a moderate core, chewy tannins and pretty good length and grip on the finish. Not too bad in its way. 2020-2035+. **86.**

### **2012 Château Magdelaine**

*La reine est morte.*

### **2012 Château Moulin St. Georges**

Like the 2012 Château de Fonbel, the sample of the Moulin St. Georges was reduced and it would not have been fair to take a note on it in this condition and would have been rude to ask to taste another sample- given how late we were to our appointment.

### **2012 Château Pavie-Macquin**

The 2012 Château Pavie-Macquin is a modern and ill-conceived wine. The nose is a blend of boysenberry, black raspberry, a touch of bug spray, chocolate, coffee bean and a cocktail of luxuriant new oak from a plethora of different *tonneliers*. On the palate the wine is



full-bodied and fairly restrained by the excessive standards of this estate, with a simple and for-square personality, and a very short, woody and astringent finish. I have had worse vintages from Pavie-Macquin in the last few years, but one should not confuse this wine with a wine with any suggestion of quality or complexity. 2018-2030? **80.**

#### **2012 Château Puy-Blanquet**

The 2012 Château Puy-Blanquet is a really lovely example of the vintage, and for one of the most modest wines in the necklace of glittering Right Bank estates represented by the Moueix family, it has really turned out well in this fine year. The lovely nose is deep and pure, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, a touch of nutskin, tobacco leaf, espresso and a bit of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthful, with a fine core, chewy tannins and a lovely, tangy finish. This is quite structured for a young Puy-Blanquet, but it is quite classic and will be a terrific value. 2020-2045+. **88+.**

#### **2012 Château Quinault l'Enclos**

The 2012 Château Quinault l'Enclos is a blend of eighty-one percent merlot and nineteen percent cabernet franc, and with the difficulties from the flowering this year, was produced from a miniscule twenty hectoliters per hectare. The wine is just under fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a lovely nose of dark berries, espresso, cigar smoke, tobacco leaf and a bit of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite primary, with a suave attack, a lovely core, refined tannins and very good length and grip on the focused finish. This is quite a polished wine, with a bit more makeup than it probably really needs, but it is still a very successful and well-balanced example of the vintage. 2019-2045. **89.**

#### **2012 Le Dragon de Quintus**

The 2012 Le Dragon de Quintus is one of the lowest octane wines in the Haut-Brion stable this year, coming in at 14.2 percent alcohol. The wine is a blend of seventy-nine percent merlot and twenty-one percent cabernet franc in this vintage. The nose is deep, ripe and quite marked by its new wood, as it offers up scents of black cherries, pomegranate, coffee, herb tones, a bit of citrus zest and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and quite fiery, with a solid core, chewy tannins and a long, quite coarse and unconvincing finish. This will need time to soften, but probably is balanced enough to do so eventually, but the wine seems likely to always be rather a coarse and unsophisticated affair. 2020-2040. **84.**

#### **2012 Château Quintus**

The 2012 Château Quintus is a bit riper than its second wine, tipping the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol. The wine is a blend this year of eighty-nine percent merlot and eleven percent cabernet franc and offers up a deep and modern nose of red and black cherries, chocolate, a bit of black raspberry, coffee, cigar smoke and aggressively spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and quite chunky, with little delineation or focus. The finish is long, coarse and manages to combine an unpromising mix of uncovered wood and plenty of skin tannins that will take quite a few years to resolve. The wine probably will do so with bottle age, but one wonders where is the inherent elegance that defines so many of the great Right Bank wines in the 2012 vintage? 2020-2040. **85.**

#### **2012 Château Saintayme**

The 2012 Château Saintayme- which is owned by Denis Durantou of Château l'Église-Clinet, is a ripe and pretty wine, tipping the scales at fourteen percent alcohol, but also showing good freshness and bounce on the palate. The bouquet is a blend of black cherries, chocolate, herb tones, coffee bean and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on

the attack, with a good core, moderate complexity and a long, gently tannic finish. This is one of my favorite wines in the Durantou stable this year. 2019-2035. **87.**

#### **2012 Château La Serre**

La Serre is another very successful 2012 in the Moueix stables. The wine offers up a very expressive bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, menthol, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite sappy at the core, with fine, nascent complexity, ripe tannins and a long, classy finish. A fine result in this vintage and another excellent value to be found on the Right Bank. 2020-2045+. **90.**

#### **2012 Château Simard**

The 2012 Château Simard was the first wine picked in the coterie of estates owned by Vauthier family, and the quite forward nature of this wine probably has a bit to do with the rain ten days prior to picking getting started here. Nevertheless, it is a very pretty wine that will drink well early on in its evolution, with no rough edges and a velvety, medium-full personality. The bouquet is a ripe and wide open blend of black cherries, plums, chocolate, herb tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and shows no rough edges, with good, but not great depth at the core, soft tannins and nice length on the easy-going finish. A very good restaurant wine. 2013-2020. **87.**

#### **2012 Château Soutard**

The 2012 Château Soutard is a dull and modern wine that offers up a cookie-cutter bouquet of black cherries, coffee bean, tar, pine resin and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is dense, full-bodied and a touch green on the backend from uneven ripeness, with dry-edged tannins from the wood and very minimal complexity or potential for charm. 2018-2030? **81.**

#### **2012 Château La Tour Figeac**

I am sure that there are a few wines that Stephan Derenoncourt's consultancy does a decent job with (Prieuré-Lichine comes immediately to mind), but the 2012 Château La Tour Figeac is not one of them. The modern, dense and four-square nose is a mélange of black cherries, a touch of blueberry, coffee bean, smoke, a bit of weediness and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is dense, full-bodied and extremely simple, with a good core, firm tannins and a long, leaden, over-extracted and exceedingly uninteresting finish. 2018-2030+? **78.**

#### **2012 Château Troplong-Mondot**

The 2012 Château Troplong-Mondot was clearly one of the worst and most manipulated wines I tasted during my ten days in Bordeaux on this trip. The totally spoofed nose offers up an absurd concoction of framboise, boysenberry, chocolate syrup and raw, sawdusty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, fat and oily, with the raw oak searing the backend on the short, fat and totally ponderous finish. I can understand this kind of aromatic and flavor profile in a vintage like 2010, where an unrelenting Mother Nature forced *vignerons* to leave their grapes out there trying to ripen the tannins while the sugars soared out of control, but in a vintage of such classic proportions and stunning potential such as 2012 was on the Right Bank, this cartoon of a wine is borderline preposterous. This could even be worse than the totally undrinkable 2010 Troplong-Mondot. Tasted twice with equally banal results. ??? **65.**

#### **2012 Château Trotteville**

The 2012 Château Trotteville shows a fair bit of uneven ripeness in its bouquet of dark berries, cigar ash, herbs, tobacco leaf and spicy, Taransaud new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, simple and a touch green, with a solid core, firm tannins and sound length and grip on the borderline underripe finish. Not special. 2020-2040. **83.**

### 2012 Château Villemaurine

The 2012 Château Villemaurine is one of those modern wines in St. Émilion where the shape of the vintage has been respected a bit and the wine has not turned out too badly as a result. The nose is a blend of black cherries, chocolate, coffee bean and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pretty dense, but with some semblance of shape and complexity, nicely covered tannins and pretty good length and grip on the four-square finish. This is okay. 2020-2040. **85+**.



*Château Margaux- one of the most strikingly beautiful estates in all of Bordeaux.*

### **Margaux**

*The commune of Margaux looks to have really struggled in the drought of 2012, and this is one of the regions where the top successes of the vintage can be counted on one hand and a couple of toes. It just seemed at many estates that the serious challenges of hydric stress, sunburned berries, a bit of hail at the start of June and unevenly ripe bunches presented more hurdles than could be successfully negotiated, and there are a lot of rather middling quality wines to be found in Margaux in the vintage of 2012. Some estates tried to compensate for the “hole at the core” found in 2012 by extracting a bit more- a strategy that did not work. Others seem to have been afraid to extract too much and have ended up with very feeble wines of no aromatic or flavor personality. It is a tough year in Margaux in general, with a few very impressive standouts that buck the trend and tower above the wines of their neighbors.*

**2012 Château Angludet**

I tasted all three samples of the 2012 Château Angludet that were present at the UGC Margaux tasting and they were all extremely reduced and impossible to evaluate.

**2012 Château Brane-Cantenac**

The 2012 Château Brane-Cantenac is one of the most successful vintages I have had the pleasure to taste from this property in years. The deep and quite classic nose offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, tobacco leaf and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a good core, moderate, chewy tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused finish. This is a very well done example of the 2012 vintage! 2020-2040. **89+**.

**2012 Château Cantenac-Brown**

Château Cantenac-Brown is one of those more modern wines that has benefitted from the inherent elegance of the 2012 vintage, and while it is not a great wine, it has a nice sense of restraint from the year's characteristics. The bouquet is a blend of cassis, Cuban cigars, dark soil tones, cigar ash and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish and a bit linear, with modest complexity, but a sound core and a bit of backend rigidity from its new oak. The wine is not particularly long or complex, but it is at least restrained in its style. 2018-2025+? **85**.

**2012 Château Dauzac**

I have had some wines from Château Dauzac that I have liked in the recent past, but the 2012 comes across as rather over-extracted and a bit charmless and heavy-handed as a result. The modern nose is a blend of black cherries, cassis, tobacco leaf, coffee bean and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, chewy and dry-edged, with quite a modest core of fruit, solid length and a tannic, four-square finish. This really needed to be extracted much more gently than it was. 2018-2025+? **82**.

**2012 Château Desmirail**

The 2012 Château Desmirail is a thoroughly modern and simple wine, but at least the tannins here on the backend have been well-managed and are not obtrusive. The straightforward nose is a blend of cassis, coffee bean, cigar smoke and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, hollow at the core and quite short, with a fair bit of tannin that is happily, well-integrated. The wine is low acid and comes across as flat and charmless, but at least it is not particularly offensive in style. 2018-2025+? **80**.

**2012 Château Ferrière**

The 2012 Ferrière is a young and fairly chewy middleweight in the making, but with good bones and the prospects of offering up some very good drinking with sufficient bottle age. The fine nose is a blend of black cherries, tobacco leaf, a touch of black raspberry, dark soil tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and nicely balanced, with a perfectly sound core, ripe, chewy tannins and good length and grip on the youthful finish. This will be pretty tasty wine with some cellaring, but it is not in the league of the last few vintages here. 2020-2040. **87**.

**2012 Château Giscours**

The 2012 Château Giscours is a tad on the low acid side in this vintage, but it is also nicely structured and should prove to be a very good example of the year with a bit of bottle age. The bouquet is a stylish and quite classic blend of cassis, dark berries, French roast, tobacco leaf, fresh herb tones, dark soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and sports a good core of fruit, with fine focus and balance, chewy tannins and fine length and grip on the

nascently complex finish. This will need some time in the cellar to soften up its tannins, but will be quite tasty once it has had a chance to resolve. 2020-2040. **88.**

#### **2012 Blason d'Issan**

The 2012 Blason d'Issan included forty percent merlot in the blend this year (the other component being sixty percent cabernet sauvignon), and perhaps this merlot was less than satisfactory at d'Issan in this vintage, as the wine has come off somewhat heavy and plodding. The nose is deep and pretty straightforward, offering up scents of dark berries, coffee grounds, cigar ash, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pretty four-square, with a solid core, modest tannins and a low acid, rather plodding finish. This is okay, but no better this year. 2015-2025+. **86.**

#### **2012 Château d'Issan**

At Château d'Issan, it seems likely that some of the family disagreements that led to little major investment at the property (at least one of the Cruse cousins here had no interest in capital projects) in recent times are now part of the past, as Emmanuel Cruse has found a partner to buy out his less than happy cousins at the property and a new era has been launched here. The wines in recent times at Château d'Issan have been truly exceptional, and one can imagine a future where the superb quality of late is only a jumping off point for even greater pedigree as time goes by. In any case, the 2012 Château d'Issan is a very good example of the vintage, offering up a complex and stylish nose of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, smoke and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and well-balanced, with a very good core of fruit, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the fairly low acid and complex finish. This is a very good result for 2012. 2020-2040+. **90.**

#### **2012 Château Kirwan**

The 2012 Château Kirwan is a modern and astringent wine of very questionable balance for the future and no signs of early charm. The modern bouquet is a mix of black raspberries, chocolate, spicy new oak and cigar wrappers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and completely rigid, with a dip in the mid-palate and a dry finish of uncovered wood tannins. Will this ever even soften? ??? **75.**

#### **2012 Château Labégorce**

There is clearly good things going on at Château Labégorce, and this is one Margaux property to keep an eye on in the coming years. The 2012 is a very good wine in the making- perhaps a touch too marked by spicy Taransaud oak for my tastes- but, still quite balanced and potentially complex. The bouquet offers up a mix of cassis, blackberries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and a fair bit of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows off impressive mid-palate depth, with fine focus and grip, very good acids for the vintage and a long, balanced and ripely tannic finish. There is still a bit of uncovered oak tannin to integrate on the backend here today, but I get no sense that this is going to be an issue with a bit of bottle age. A fine result in a difficult vintage from a property that seems to be on the rise! 2020-2040. **89.**

#### **2012 Château Lascombes**

Château Lascombes was recently sold and I do not know if the 2012 was a product of the old regime here or the first vintage from the new owners. Let us hope that the latter is not the case, as this would be a very inauspicious beginning! The weird and thoroughly modern nose offers up scents of mocha, mud, cigar ash, dark berries and plenty of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite over-extracted, with a modest core and a dry-

edged, chewy and heavy-handed finish of zero complexity or style. I cannot imagine this wine ever having a window of even modest drinkability. ??? **68.**

### **2012 Château Malescot St. Exupéry**

The 2012 Château Malescot St. Exupéry is a modern wine of extremely questionable balance. The simple nose is a blend of cassis, black raspberries, cigar ash and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch sweet-sour, with tons of spicy new oak, sound focus and a reasonably long, tannic and precarious finish. At this point in time, it is impossible to say whether the fruit or the wood will win out in this wine. There could be just enough stuffing to absorb the new oak tannins for a bit and give the wine a short window of more enjoyable drinkability. But, it could also just dry out and never have even its five minutes of fame. 2018-2025+? **82.**

### **2012 Pavillon Rouge de Margaux**

By the numbers, I should have been more impressed with the Château Margaux roster in 2012 than I ultimately was, and I have been reflecting upon this ever since my return from Bordeaux and still cannot come up with a reason why this is so. Only thirty percent of the crop made it into the Pavillon Rouge this year, with the *cépages* comprised of sixty-three percent merlot and four percent cabernet franc. The wine is a classic thirteen percent alcohol as well. The bouquet is very pretty in its blend of black cherries, cassis, French roast, cigar smoke, a nice dollop of soil and just a bit of new oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full and quite spit-polished, with a creamy attack, a sound core, rather modest complexity and just a bit of backend tannin adding structure and grip on the moderately long finish. This wine is perfectly okay, and yet it really seems to lack a bit of soul. 2019-2035. **88.**

### **2012 Château Margaux**

The 2012 Château Margaux was made up of only thirty-four percent of the crop this year, with fully eighty-seven percent of the blend comprised of cabernet sauvignon, and the balance a mix of ten percent merlot, two percent cabernet franc and one percent petit verdot for good measure. The yields here were thirty-nine hectoliters per hectare and the wine tips the scales at an utterly classic thirteen percent alcohol. So why is this wine so unmoving? Paul Pontallier waxed eloquently for quite some time about how much he likes the 2012 Margaux, but I was left with the impression that this is a wine which is very much crafted in the cellar, rather than born in the vineyards, and I long for something more here these days. The cool and reserved nose offers up scents of mulberry, cassis, tobacco leaf, cigar smoke, lovely gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke and a suave base of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a polished attack, a fine core and a fair bit of chewy tannin perking up the long and beautifully focused finish. All of the constituent components here tell my brain I should like this wine a lot more than I do, but it just seems to be missing that spark and the whole does not seem greater than the sum of its parts in 2012. This is a very well-made wine that is just a bit overly slick for me. 2023-2055+. **91+.**

### **2012 Pavillon Blanc de Margaux**

The draconian selection process here also weighed heavily on the 2012 Pavillon Blanc de Margaux, as only thirty percent of the crop made it into this lovely white wine. The nose is bright and complex, offering up scents of gooseberry, lime zest, chalky soil tones, gentle grassiness, a nice touch of new oak and a delicate topnote of petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, crisp and bouncy, with nice succulence on the attack, a sound core and a long, vibrant and youthful finish. How nuts is this- the 2012 Pavillon Blanc is my favorite wine in the cellar this year! 2013-2020+. **92.**

### **2012 Château Marquis de Terme**

The 2012 Château Marquis de Terme is a far cry from the very good wines made at this estate in the decade of the 1980s, as this modern wine is over-oaked and unsuccessful in this vintage. The simple nose is a blend of black raspberries, chocolate, cigar ash and oak spice. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and blunt, but, at least, shows off some decent mid-palate depth. However, the finish is astringent from uncovered oak tannins and probably plenty of skin tannins as well. A few years in the cellar may allow the fruit here to absorb some of the wood tannins, but the wine seems likely to have a very short life span and to be destined to eventually dry out. 2017-2025. **79.**

### **2012 Château Monbrison**

The 2012 Château Monbrison is one of those extremely flat, low acid 2012s that is never going to develop much charm. The nose is a blend of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, linear and chewy, with a respectable core, but a rather flat backend of substantial tannins and little spark or vibrancy. It is an okay wine, but no better. 2019-2030. **82.**

### **2012 Alter Ego de Palmer**

The yields at Château Palmer this year were only twenty-eight hectoliters per hectare, which does not help the distribution any, but which has certainly played a role in one of the greatest recent vintages at this historic estate. The Alter Ego is simply superb in 2012 and a very impressive second wine, as it soars from the glass in a deep and very pure bouquet of dark berries, cassis, cigar smoke, tobacco leaf, espresso, dark soil and a rather generous framing of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and utterly classic in profile, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, fairly substantial tannins and a very long, complex and impressively tangy finish. This is a terrific vintage of Alter Ego whose score is kept down just a touch by the (currently?) rather overt base of spicy wood. 2020-2040. **89+?**

### **2012 Château Palmer**

The 2012 Château Palmer is a brilliant wine. The harvest here took place between October 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, and the *grand vin* is comprised of a blend of forty-eight percent merlot, forty-six percent cabernet sauvignon and six percent petit verdot. The wine tips the scales at a ripe, but still quite classic 13.3 percent. The utterly stunning bouquet delivers a classic Palmer blend of blackberries, mulberries, cassis, dark chocolate, gravel, cigar smoke, a youthful touch of tobacco leaf and a very stylish base of cedary, spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly refined, with a beautiful core of fruit, superb focus and balance, ripe substantial and perfectly-integrated tannins and simply stunning length and grip on the seamless and magical finish. This is a cut above the 1983 Palmer, to give some context as to its quality! 2022-2060. **95.**

### **2012 Château Prieuré-Lichine**

The 2012 Prieuré-Lichine is really quite lovely and this is another property that is really making some of the best wines in its history today. If Stephan Derenoncourt's firm is still associated with this estate (they had been the consultants here since 1999), it has been well hidden in the last few vintages, as this is once again a very elegant and classy example of the vintage. The bouquet is a lovely blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, a touch of curry, dark soil tones and a nice base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, fairly chewy finish. This is on the low acid side, but it is one example of the 2012 vintage that has not lost vibrancy from its lower acids. A fine result and a serious value. 2020-2040. **90.**



### **2012 Château Rauzan-Gassies**

The 2012 Château Rauzan-Gassies is a young and chewy example of the vintage that offers up lovely, nascent complexity the potential for fine evolution in the cellar. The bouquet is a blend of dark berries, cassis, complex, dark soil tones, espresso, cigar smoke and a fair bit of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and chewy, with a fine core, firm tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. This is one of the most oaky young vintages of Rauzan-Gassies that I have tasted, and though the wine remains well-balanced, I hope this is a reflection of shorter yields leading to a bit more new oak being used in this vintage and not a sign that the Quié family is intent on bulking up this lovely wine with more new wood on a regular basis. This is a fine result in 2012, but it will need some time to soften its tannins and start to blossom. 2020-2040+. **90+**.

### **2012 Château Rauzan-Ségla**

The 2012 Rauzan-Ségla is a very good wine that seems just a touch too new oaky for me today. That said, I should note that I recently had a chance to taste several recent vintages of this estate that had seemed a bit over-oaked to my palate out of the blocks and they had integrated their wood component beautifully and no longer showed any such characteristics, so perhaps I am being overly cautious with the 2012 Rauzan-Ségla. In any case, the wine offers up a pretty bouquet of black raspberries, cassis, French roast, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite suave on the attack, with a good core, chewy tannins (some currently from the wood treatment) and lovely focus and grip on the complex finish. Assuming that the 2012 will evolve along the lines of other recent vintages and gobble up its oak completely with a bit of bottle age, then the wine will certainly merit a score at the top of the range. 2020-2040+. **87-90+**.

### **2012 Château Siran**

The 2012 Château Siran is a touch over-extracted this year. The bouquet is a blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and has a good core, but it is a bit “forced” stylistically. The finish is long and chewy, with some tannins from extraction and some from the new oak. It is slightly dry on the backend today, but probably has the stuffing to carry the wood eventually, but it has missed out on the opportunity to reflect the inherent elegance of the 2012 vintage. Okay, but not the best of recent vintages from Siran. 2018-2030. **84**.

### **2012 Château du Tertre**

The 2012 Château du Tertre is a modern and quite ham-fisted wine this year, but again, the wine is noteworthy (for its genre) for at least good tannin management. The simple and modern nose shows a touch of uneven ripeness in its blend of black cherries, a bit of bell pepper, cigar ash and plenty of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and rather meagerly endowed at the core, with chewy, well-integrated tannins and a short and simple finish. 2018-2025+? **83**.

### ***Listrac and Moulis***

*The communes of Listrac and Moulis seem to have been poster children for the vintage, with the drought characteristics of slightly coarse tannins and inadequate mid-palate depth certainly evident in several of the wines I tasted from these two communes. But, there are also some really nice and successful 2012s to be found here, and with prices always quite reasonable, the best wines of these two communes will certainly merit attention for those seeking good value. For those who lament the dizzying spiral upwards of prices of the most famous classed growths,*

*it is the top wines from communes such as Lustrac and Moulis where one should be paying more attention, as there are some really fine wines being made here these days that offer up truly superb value. Perhaps 2012 is not the strongest vintage for the wines from this region (though there are some undeniable successes here in this most recent vintage), but in general, these two communes remains among the “happy hunting” grounds for folks that want ageworthy and complex claret at yesteryear’s more favorable pricing!*

### **2012 Château Clarke (Lustrac)**

The 2012 Château Clarke is just a touch over-extracted this year, which leads to a bit of coarseness on the backend and a slightly dense aromatic impression, but, given the vagaries of the vintage, it is really not too bad of a result. The extracted nose offers up scents of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, dark soil, tobacco leaf and cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full and quite suave on the attack, with a moderate core and some chewy, slightly rustic tannins poking out on the rather coarse finish. This will be okay with some bottle age- but, no great shakes. 2018-2025+. **85.**

### **2012 Château Chasse-Spleen (Moulis)**

Château Chasse-Spleen has been on quite a roll in the last several vintages and the estate’s 2012 is a superb success and an absolute steal for the vintage! The deep and very classy nose wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, cassis, espresso, cigar ash, a lovely base of gravelly soil tones, smoke and a touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and potentially quite velvety on the attack, with a fine core, fairly low acids and a fair bit of ripe, old school tannins that will need to be resolved on the long finish. All this lovely wine needs is some bottle age, as it is impeccably balanced and should prove to be one of the great bargains to be found in this year. 2021-2045. **90.**

### **2012 Château Fonréaud (Lustrac)**

The 2012 Château Fonréaud has turned out pretty well, with an old school and chewy profile and good depth and nascent complexity on both the nose and palate. There is a touch of uneven ripeness here evident on both the nose and palate, but the wine has made the best of it and will drink pretty well once it has had a bit of bottle age. The bouquet is a blend of cassis, dark berries, dark soil tones, tobacco leaf, woodsmoke and just a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, structured and smoky, with a pretty good core, good focus and grip and a long, chewy and moderately flat finish. This has a bit of the slightly heavy-handed texture of wines such as Château Montrose in this vintage, but it will age well and with bottle age, it may prove that I am underrating it just a touch. 2018-2030+. **85.**

### **2012 Château Fourcas-Borie (Lustrac)**

Like all of the properties owned by the Jean-Eugène Borie side of the family (including Ducru-Beaucaillou), the 2012 Château Fourcas-Borie is an excellent example of the vintage. The Borie family only purchased this estate at the end of 2008, so this is still a work in progress and the wines get better here with each passing vintage. As the team was not content with the quality of the petit verdot this year, none was used for the wine, which ended up being a blend of fifty-four percent merlot and forty-six percent cabernet sauvignon. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and is really quite a fine example, offering up a bouquet of cassis, blackberries, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and a long, moderately tannic finish. This is one of the best examples in Lustrac these days and the 2012 Fourcas-Borie is really one of the sleepers of the vintage. 2017-2030+. **88.**

### **2012 Château Fourcas-Dupré (Listrac)**

The 2012 Château Fourcas-Dupré is another of those wines from this vintage which has turned out pretty well aromatically, but comes across as a bit flat from its low acids and where the slightly tough tannins from less than ideal ripening are a touch bitter on the backend. The bouquet is a fine blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, gravel, tobacco leaf and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is a tad less interesting, as its fullish format is suave on the attack, but flattens out at the mid-palate, with the fairly moderate tannins betraying a slightly bitter edge from uneven ripeness. Not bad, but not a great year for this property. 2019-2030. **84.**

### **2012 Château Fourcas-Hosten (Listrac)**

The 2012 Château Fourcas-Hosten is a modern wine where the inherent elegance of the vintage has nicely restrained the nose, but the wine has still succumbed to a clueless cellar regimen and is significantly less interesting on the palate than it is aromatically. The bouquet is a modern, but restrained mélange of black cherries, cassis, a touch of coffee bean, dark soil tones and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish and glossy on the attack, with a hole in the mid-palate and a dry-edged and chewy finish from uncovered oak tannins. This will probably have a quite short window of drinking potential, as the tannins will need to soften up a bit, but the wine seems most likely to dry out with any extended bottle age as well. 2018-2025? **80.**

### **2012 Château Maucaillou (Moulis)**

The 2012 Château Maucaillou is a modern and slightly pumped up wine that does not really impress in this vintage. The bouquet is a blend of black cherries, cassis, tobacco leaf, dark soil and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate this deep and full-bodied wine takes a decided dip in the mid-palate, with modest complexity and plenty of uncovered, dry wood tannins poking out on the backend from its unrepentant modern cellar techniques. Ultimately, this is a very short and very dry wine of modest appeal. 2017-2025. **80.**

### **2012 Château Poujeaux (Moulis)**

Like so many of the modernists in this vintage, the 2012 Château Poujeaux is fairly restrained on the nose this year from the style of the year, but somehow has managed to lose all of its mid-palate stuffing and end up very dry-edged on the backend from its new wood treatment. The bouquet is the nicest part of this wine, offering up scents of cassis, Cuban cigars, dark soil tones, espresso and plenty of nutty, luxuriant new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite hollow at the core, with rigid wood tannins and a short, dry-edged finish of little promise. You get what you pay for... 2017-2025. **80.**

### ***St. Julien***

*St. Julien is home to some of the very finest wines of the entire vintage- on either bank- as the estates of Ducru-Beaucaillou, Beychevelle, Lagrange, Talbot and Gruaud-Larose have really made splendid wines this year. Surprisingly, given how rock solid the team at Léoville Las Cases has been in the last several vintages, the 2012 wines here are a bit over-extracted and dense in style, and I will be very surprised if they ever come around to vie with the likes of Ducru-Beaucaillou or Beychevelle in the years to come. 2012 was clearly a year where folks needed to embrace the style of the vintage and make wines in a more elegant manner, which the Las Cases team seemed to have struggled with mightily, as the wines are really pretty unappetizing out of the blocks and quite disappointing. The more modern producers in the commune, like Léoville Barton, Branaire-Ducru and Léoville Poyferré are (as usual) less successful and interesting to my palate, as they are not likely to let the dictates of the vintage get in the way of their winemaking formulae. There are also several middle of the road wines here in 2012, where the*

*overall impression is of rather flat and chewy wines that are not too badly balanced, but seem likely to never really deliver any vibrancy or charm as they age.*

### **2012 Amiral de Beychevelle**

I caught the 2012 Amiral de Beychevelle right after it had been racked, so my impression may not be entirely fair to the wine, as this is hardly the ideal time to be tasting it. The wine is a blend of forty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, forty-seven percent merlot and eight percent cabernet franc and tips the scales at 13.4 percent alcohol. Right after the racking, it was showing a touch angular, but with a good nose of cassis, dark berries, bitter chocolate, tobacco leaf, a touch of cigar ash and a nice framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full and youthful, with a good core and just a touch of a green edge to the chewy tannins on the long finish. This will certainly be quite good and may even rate outstandingly, once it has had some bottle age. 2019-2035+. **88-90?**

### **2012 Château Beychevelle**

Philippe Blanc noted that the harvest for the merlot at Beychevelle was prolonged this year, taking place over nine days from September 27<sup>th</sup> (normally, it takes four days to bring in the merlot here), as the uneven ripening of this variety in 2012 (due primarily to hydric stress) required several more passes through the vineyards. The cabernet sauvignon was much more homogenous in its ripeness and was gathered over a normal cycle from October 12<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup>, and the resulting Beychevelle, which came in at 13.3 percent alcohol, is a very classic and promising example of the vintage. The superb bouquet offers up a lovely and very pure mélange of cassis, dark berries, Cuban cigars, a touch of violet, dark chocolate, soil and a very discreet base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with ripe, chewy tannins, fine focus and balance and a very long, youthful and classy finish. Texturally, this is really a stunning success in 2012! A classic Beychevelle in the making and one of the top wines on the Left Bank this year. 2027-2060. **92+**.

### **2012 Château Branaire-Ducru**

The 2012 Château Branaire-Ducru is rather dense and over-extracted in this vintage, offering up a nose of cassis, blackberries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a bit of bell pepper and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite charmless, with a dense core, sound focus and grip, but a dry-edged and tannic finish from uncovered wood tannins. There is probably sufficient stuffing here to eat up the wood with bottle age, but this will never be a charming vintage of Branaire-Ducru. 2020-2040? **84-87**.

### **2012 Grande Réserve Croix de Beaucaillou**

The 2012 Grande Réserve Croix de Beaucaillou is a stunning wine and amongst the top wines to be found in the Left Bank in this vintage. Bruno Borie and his team have most obviously embraced the style of the 2012 vintage and have produced a pair of absolutely stellar wines from the Ducru *vignoble*, with the Croix de Beaucaillou being comprised of a blend of sixty percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty-eight percent merlot and two percent petit verdot and tipping the scales at a very classic 13.1 percent alcohol. It was raised in sixty percent new oak (surprisingly, a very high percentage of the barrels used for this and the *grand vin* are Taransaud in origin- perhaps demonstrating that not all Taransaud is created equally), but shows quite modest oak influence. The deep and lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of cassis, black cherries, gravel, cigar smoke, espresso and a discreet base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, classy, suave

tannins and outstanding length and grip on the seamless and very impressive finish. A superb wine in the making! 2019-2040+. **91.**

#### **2012 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou**

Along with Palmer and Pichon-Lalande, the 2012 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou is one of the very top three wines to be found in the Left Bank and superior to any of the First Growths in this vintage. Due to all the difficulties during the flowering, the 2012 yields at Ducru are the smallest (along with 2011) in the last twenty-five years at the property and came in just under thirty hectoliters per hectare. The merlot was collected here between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of October and the cabernet sauvignon between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup>, so the harvesting teams here did not come up against the pressure of the heavy rains that began on the 17<sup>th</sup> of the month and continued for the remainder of the autumn. Bruno Borie noted that, “as the cabernet sauvignon was really exceptional this year, we chose to include more of it in the *grand vin* than we normally would do” and the *cépages* of the 2012 Ducru-Beaucaillou is ninety-one percent cabernet sauvignon and nine percent merlot in 2012. This utterly classic wine comes in at an even thirteen percent alcohol and will be raised in ninety-five percent new wood for its first eighteen months of *elevage* and then racked into one wine barrels for the remaining twelve months of barrel aging prior to bottling. The deep and absolutely stunning nose offers up a superb blend of dark berries, cassis, tobacco leaf, complex, gravelly soil tones, espresso, cigar smoke and a nice base of cedary, spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe, beautifully-integrated tannins, excellent focus and balance and a very long, pure and vibrant finish. This is a great, great wine in the making! 2025-2065+. **95.**

#### **2012 Château Gloria**

The 2012 Château Gloria is one of those flat and chewy wines that is a bit sinewy and seems unlikely to ever really drink with any *élan*, even if the constituent components here seem likely to resolve reasonably well with bottle age. The bouquet is a blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, tobacco leaf, gravel and cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, a bit flat and a touch dry-edged as well, with a very modest core and a reasonably long, chewy finish. This is passable, but not great shakes. 2019-2030. **86.**

#### **2012 Château Gruaud Larose**

The 2012 Château Gruaud Larose is a lovely wine and clearly one of the best wines to be found on the Right Bank this year. The deep and classy nose offers up scents of cassis, mulberries, Cuban tobacco, gravel, a touch of cigar smoke and a nicely done base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This is a touch low in acidity, but it reminds me a bit of the 1985 Gruaud, which has aged very well indeed. Good juice. 2020-2040+. **91.**

#### **2012 Les Fiefs de Lagrange**

Château Lagrange is at the top of its game right now, and this can be seen both in the superb quality of their *grand vin* over the last decade and the fine results of their second wine, Les Fiefs de Lagrange over this same time period. The 2012 Les Fiefs is a fine example of the vintage, being comprised of sixty-one percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty-one percent merlot and eight percent petit verdot. The wine is deep and nicely structured, offering up a bouquet of black cherries, blackberries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, tobacco and just a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and quite fresh, with a good core, lovely balance and a fair bit

of tannin to resolve on the focused and classic finish. A fine bottle in the making. 2019-2030+. **88.**

### **2012 Château Lagrange**

The 2012 Château Lagrange was made from the lowest yields in the last twenty years at the estate (38.75 hectoliters per hectare), and is two-thirds cabernet sauvignon this year. The remainder of the blend is thirty percent merlot and three percent petit verdot. The harvest was quite late here in 2012, with the merlot brought in between October 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> and the cabernet sauvignon and petit verdot October 15<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup>. The wine is quite classically ripe at 13.2 percent alcohol and offers up a deep and very pure bouquet of cassis, black cherries, dark chocolate, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a stylish base of new oak and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and balance and a long, firm and ripely tannic finish. The acids are on the low side here, but this wine avoids the slightly flat side of the vintage that plagues other 2012s from the Médoc, and will age beautifully. 2020-2040. **91.**



*Château Ducru-Beaucaillou, the resplendent home to one of the two greatest Left Bank wines of the 2012 vintage.*

### **2012 Château Lalande-Borie**

Château Lalande-Borie was created in 1970 by Bruno Borie's father, Jean-Eugène Borie, from vineyard parcels purchased by Ducru-Beaucaillou that are found on the plateau of St. Julien, away from the Gironde and over towards Châteaux Talbot and Lagrange. The soils on this side of the commune are deeper and contain more clay and less gravel than those at Ducru.

The 2012 Château Lalande-Borie is a really lovely example of the vintage. The wine is a blend of fifty-three percent merlot, forty percent cabernet sauvignon and seven percent cabernet franc and was raised in thirty percent new oak this year (with the remainder raised in one wine barrels) and comes in at a very classic 13.1 percent alcohol. The bouquet is deep and nicely reserved, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and just a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very elegant, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and nascent complexity, suave tannins and very good length and grip on the youthful finish. This will be a lovely wine with five to seven years of bottle age and is an excellent value. 2018-2030+. **88.**

#### **2012 Château Langoa Barton**

The 2012 Château Langoa Barton shows a bit of the vintage's weak spots and the winemaking techniques here, as it is both a touch overripe and underripe at the same time. The modern nose is a blend of black cherries, cassis, bell pepper, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit "forced" stylistically, with a sound core, and nicely managed tannins. The finish has reasonable length and grip, and there is not an overtly green edge to the closing tannins, but it is hard to imagine this wine ever rising above merely "solid" in quality. At least the vintage has put a bit of restraint on the wine. 2002-2040. **86.**

#### **2012 Château Léoville Barton**

I tasted three different samples of the 2012 Château Léoville Barton during the UGC tastings, as I really thought the wine would be better than it showed that day. Perhaps, as it was raining, the barometric pressure was playing havoc with these samples (though the Beychevelle was spot on at the same tasting!), but if this really is the wine, it is not a great vintage for this property. The bouquet is the best part of the wine, as it offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, tobacco leaf, a bit of soil and plenty of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, flat and absolutely hollow in the mid-palate, with moderate tannins and reasonable focus, but no length or grip. Is this really the wine?

#### **2012 Le Petit Lion**

The Las Cases team has not done as well in 2012 as it has in the last several vintages, and the 2012 Petit Lion seems decidedly over-extracted this year. The nose is a blend of black cherries, cassis, Cuban cigars, dark soil tones and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and seems quite ripe for the vintage, with a good core and a long, rather blurry, chewy and slightly dry-edged finish. After the very good examples of Petit Lion in the last four vintages (particularly the stellar 2008), it is pretty clear that the young vines here suffered in the 2012 vintage. 2020-2040? **83+?**

#### **2012 Clos du Marquis**

Surprisingly, the 2012 Clos du Marquis is not much better than the 2012 Petit Lion, as this is another rather dense, stern and charmless example of the vintage. The nose is a blend of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, leather, dark soil tones and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, dense and tannic, with a very extracted personality and a long, flat and chewy finish. There is little doubt that this wine has the stuffing to eventually absorb all of its tannins, but it seems awfully dull and heavy-handed out of the blocks and it is hard imagining this vintage reaching its customary level of quality. 2022-2040+? **84.**

#### **2012 Château Léoville Las Cases**

The 2012 Château Léoville Las Cases is another deeply extracted and rather dense example of the vintage. It has more style and inherent complexity than the Clos du Marquis, but



it is not destined to be a great vintage of Las Cases. The nose is a fairly complex blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, gravel, dark chocolate, just a hint of violet and nutty, luxuriant new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and heavily extracted, with a good core of fruit, sound soil expression and a long, very, very chewy finish. This has the best chance of any wine in the portfolio this year of blossoming into something of merit, but when one thinks back to how brilliantly the team here handled the 2008 vintage, this rather lumbering 2012 Las Cases is a bit of a surprise. 2022-2050. **88.**

#### **2012 Château Léoville Poyferré**

The 2012 Léoville Poyferré is a modern wine that is best on the nose, as the palate is a bit precariously balanced and over-oaked. The nose is modern and appealing in its mélange of black cherries, mocha, cigar smoke, a touch of dark soil and plenty of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit dry-edged, with low acids, modest depth at the core and a long, chewy finish that closes with uncovered wood tannins. With this wine, I suspect that it will always be a bit too marked by its new wood, as there does not really seem to be sufficient depth of fruit here to carry all this lumber across the finish line. If it does manage to absorb all of its wood tannin, then it will merit a score at the upper end of the range, but I suspect it will probably not be able to do so and will score at the lower end of the range. 2020-2040? **83-87?**

#### **2012 Château Saint-Pierre**

The 2012 Château Saint-Pierre is quite marked by its toasty new wood on the nose today, but at least it is not dry-edged from the oak on the palate. The bouquet is a blend of toasty oak, cassis, dark berries, tobacco leaf and gravel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, low acid and really quite linear, with solid depth at the core, plenty of chewy tannins and a rather heavy-handed and plodding finish. There is decent length and grip here, and the wine will come around a bit with bottle age, but there is not much vibrancy here. 2020-2040. **86+.**

#### **2012 Château Talbot**

Château Talbot has made another superb wine in 2012 and this is one of the best wines in the commune this year. The deep and excellent nose offers up a complex blend of blackberries, cassis, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very refined, with a lovely core, fine focus and balance, ripe tannins and lovely brightness from good acidity on the long and nuanced finish. This reminds me quite a bit of the superb 1983 Talbot- which is better than both the 1982 and the 1985 here- and this wine should age beautifully. 2022-2050. **91+.**

### ***Pauillac***

*The vagaries of the vintage are quite clear in Pauillac in 2012, and to my palate, the finest wine in the commune is unequivocally Pichon-Lalande, whose team has embraced the style of the vintage and made one of the most elegant and complete wines to hail from this estate in many, many years. It is a beautiful and utterly classic wine that is superior to the First Growths here this year. There are several other successful wines to be found in Pauillac in 2012, but the usual strengths of the commune in its beautifully-drained, gravel mound terroirs were actually a bit of an Achilles' Heel in this vintage, as hydric stress quite clearly affected many of the plots here at the top estates and the end of season rains often caught producers with grapes out on the vines that were not yet at optimal ripeness. Overall, 2008, 2009 and 2011 are clearly superior recent vintages in Pauillac over 2012, but there are still some good wines to be found from this most recent year. Of the three First Growths in Pauillac, my favorite is the very old school, lithe Lafite-Rothschild, which is a very good wine that should exude great breed and complexity in a*

*middleweight formula when it has had the chance to fully mature. Both Latour and Mouton-Rothschild are good wines, but not in the league with their recent successes (particularly Latour, which had been on a brilliant hot streak for several years and was a paradigm of structured classicism of late), and given the prices that the First Growths sell at these days, they are really only of academic interest in 2012. Pontet-Canet, which has been on quite a hot streak in the last few vintages falls into the good, but not great camp in 2012, as the wine seems just a touch flat on the palate (not a rare occurrence in this vintage), as the wine is well-made, but seems as if the difficulties of the vintage were not totally surmounted this year.*

### **2012 Château d'Armailhac**

The 2012 Château d'Armailhac is a blend of fifty-four percent of cabernet sauvignon, twenty-nine percent merlot, fourteen percent cabernet franc and three percent petit verdot. The wine has turned out okay, but it is a bit short on the palate and seems a bit too "spit-polished" to show a lot of personality. The bouquet is a ripe blend of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and focused, with some firm backend tannins and pretty good grip on the moderate finish. This is not a bad wine, but there are others to be found in 2012 that show a lot more classical personalities than the 2012 d'Armailhac. 2012-2045+. **88.**

### **2012 Château Batailly**

The 2012 Château Batailly has really turned out well this year and is one of the sleepers of the vintage. The fine bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, espresso, dark soil tones and a nice touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, chewy tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. This will need a handful of years to blossom, but will age well and is really a very well-made 2012. 2020-2040+. **89.**

### **2012 Château Clerc Milon**

The 2012 Clerc Milon is a very technically sound wine, but it is a bit boringly slick at the same time. The wine is made up of a blend of sixty percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-nine percent merlot, nine percent cabernet franc and one percent each of petit verdot. The nose is quite cabernet-dominated (never a bad thing in the 2012 vintage), offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, Cuban cigars, gravel and plenty of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a good core and a fair bit of chewy tannin perking up the reasonably long finish. This is a well-made wine that just seems to lack a bit of soul. 2022-2045+. **88+.**

### **2012 Château Croizet-Bages**

The 2012 Château Croizet-Bages has turned out quite well in its old-fashioned, slightly rustic style. The deep and youthful nose offers up a classic Pauillac blend of cassis, cigar ash, gravel, tobacco leaf and a nice touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chewy, with a good core, a lovely signature of soil and very good length and grip on the fairly tannic finish. This will need time to resolve, but this is a very successful, old school bottle of Pauillac in the making. A fine value! 2020-2040. **88.**

### **2012 Château Duhart-Milon**

Interestingly, while the 2012 Carruades de Lafite is superb and a spitting image of its *grand vin* in this vintage, the sister property of Duhart-Milon did not fare quite as well and does not show quite the same vibrancy or bounce from good acidity in this vintage. The bouquet is deep, complex and pure, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, Cuban cigars, coffee bean,

dark soil tones and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep and full-bodied, but slightly “flat”, with a solid core, moderate tannins and reasonably good length on the focused finish. This is pure and nicely balanced, but it is one of those 2012 Left Bank wines (like Montrose) that just seems a touch flat from its relatively low acidity. 2020-2040. **88.**

#### **2012 Château Grand-Puy-Ducasse**

The 2012 Château Grand-Puy-Ducasse seems like it was a pretty good wine underneath its new oak, but the wood has been overdone and emasculated the wine. The nose is very marked by oak spice, with scents of dark berries, espresso, dark soil and cigar ash fighting to keep up with the wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full and quite well-balanced on the attack, but with the astringency from overdone new oak arriving at the mid-palate and withering the finish. There is probably enough stuffing here to absorb most of the wood with some bottle age, but the wine will always remain rigid from its oak treatment and will probably be quite short-lived as a result. 2018-2025+? **82.**

#### **2012 Château Grand-Puy-Lacoste**

Château Grand-Puy-Lacoste has fashioned one of the absolute success stories in 2012, as this wine is refined, pure and beautifully balanced. The bouquet is a lovely blend of cassis, blackberries, bitter chocolate, cigar smoke, gravel and a judicious base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very suave and balanced on the attack, with a fine core, ripe tannins and lovely length and grip on the poised and classy finish. This is a lovely claret that has embraced the “volume” of the 2012 vintage, rather than trying to superimpose more “meat on the bones” through extraction or micro-oxygenation, and the result is one of the top wines in Pauillac in this vintage! 2020-2045. **91.**

#### **2012 Château Haut-Bages Libéral**

The 2012 Château Haut-Bages Libéral is another quite successful example of the vintage, with fine poise and balance. The bouquet is a classy blend of cassis, espresso, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, tobacco leaf and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, balanced and sports a fine core of fruit, with ripe, well-measured tannins and fine length and grip on the classic finish. This will never be the most complex of Pauillacs, but it is very true to its *terroir* in this vintage and is a lovely value that I would be delighted to have in my cellar to pull out a decade down the road. 2019-2040. **88.**

#### **2012 Carruades de Lafite**

The 2012 Carruades de Lafite has turned out really well this year, though it was the recipient of most of the merlot that the estate harvested and decided to keep for one of their first two wines. The *cépages* is fifty-three percent cabernet sauvignon, forty-two percent merlot, three percent cabernet franc and two percent petit verdot. It shares with its *grand vin* a lovely purity and superb acidity for the vintage, as it offers up a deep and classy nose of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, espresso, gravel, a touch of violet and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very suave, with a fine core, moderate tannins, lovely complexity and a long, focused and tangy finish. This is an utterly complete young vintage of Carruades and it is really not far off the quality of the *grand vin* in 2012! 2020-2045. **91.**

#### **2012 Château Lafite Rothschild**

Charles Chevallier, Technical Director for all of the Barons de Rothschild estates, noted that 2012 “was a difficult year- one which we would not like to see too often!” On the Left Bank, the Rothschild properties faced the same struggles as everyone else, with uneven ripening from the difficult flowering period, season long struggles against mildew (though on the sunnier side, Monsieur Chevallier notes that alternating heat and humidity of mid-summer “were also good for

the growth of *ceps* and *chanterelles* in the woods!”), and difficult harvesting conditions, as the threat of rot in the vineyards pushed the teams to be very careful about selection this year. The merlot at Lafite this year was brought in between September 28<sup>th</sup> and October 9<sup>th</sup>, with the cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and petit verdot all collected between October 9<sup>th</sup> and October 16<sup>th</sup>. The 2012 Lafite is a blend of ninety-one percent cabernet sauvignon, 8.5 percent merlot and half a percent petit verdot, and the wine is a very old school 12.6 percent in alcohol. It is a very suave and understated customer out of the blocks, offering up scents of dark berries, cassis, French roast, a touch of tobacco leaf, cigar smoke, beautiful gravelly soil tones and a very stylish base of gently spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very effortless in its delivery, with a fine core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe tannins, very good acidity for the vintage and fine length and grip on the still very primary finish. This is a lovely Lafite that will age into a very graceful middleweight and may well resemble the extremely successful 1981 with sufficient bottle age. 2025-2050. **93.**



*The relatively understated château at Latour, overlooking its beautiful gravel mound vineyards.*

### **2012 Pauillac de Latour**

The 2012 Pauillac de Latour is a lovely and reserved example of the vintage that will need at least five to seven years to really start to drink well. As most of the estate’s merlot was consigned to this label (nearly fifty-five percent of the blend here this year is from that varietal), this wine lacks a bit of the mid-palate concentration it usually displays. The nose is a fine and

quite primary mix of cassis, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones and cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and nicely balanced, with good, but not superb depth at the core, low acids, moderate tannins and perfectly respectable length and grip on the youthful finish. This is not a great vintage for the merlot at Latour, but the Pauillac should age well and be a perfectly serviceable example of the vintage down the road. 2018-2030+. **87.**

#### **2012 Les Forts de Latour**

The 2012 Les Forts de Latour has a lot more mid-palate depth than the 2012 Pauillac, as it has a lot more cabernet sauvignon in its blend (just over seventy-six percent), but, it too is still a relatively moderately-endowed example of this great bottling. The complex and quite refined nose offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, gravel, a touch of tobacco leaf and a suave base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with fine focus and grip, good mid-palate concentration and a long, primary and ripe tannic finish. This will be a very good bottle in the fullness of time, but it will never be ranked up there with the greatest vintages of Les Forts de Latour. 2022-2045. **89.**

#### **2012 Château Latour**

The 2012 harvest at Château Latour began with the picking of the merlot on September 24<sup>th</sup> (concluding for this variety on October 4<sup>th</sup>) and finished with the cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and petit verdot during the stretch from October 5<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup>. All three wines in the stable came in at a very classic 12.8 percent alcohol this year, and as the cabernet sauvignon was the most successful varietal, the 2012 *grand vin* is over ninety percent cabernet this year. The bouquet is deep, primary and very pure and refined, as it wafts from the glass in a constellation of cassis, cigar smoke, tobacco leaf, complex, gravelly soil tones and a nice touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant on the attack, with a good core, suave and quite moderate tannins (particularly for a young Latour!), fine focus and impressive length and grip on the youthful finish. Clearly, the team at Latour did not want to risk over-extracting in this vintage, and the wine is certainly one of the most polite recent vintages of this great property. It should prove to be a lovely wine with sufficient bottle age, but this is one of the very few properties in all of Bordeaux where the trio from 2009, 2010 and 2011 tower over their 2012 counterpart. 2025-2060. **91+.**

#### **2012 Château Lynch-Bages**

The 2012 Château Lynch-Bages is another excellent success for the vintage, with fine and structured personality and impressive complexity on both the nose and palate. The deep and classy nose offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, espresso, cigar ash, smoke and a blend of cedary and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely reserved, with a rock solid core, ripe, chewy tannins and excellent length and grip on the youthful and promising finish. Lovely juice. 2020-2045. **91.**

#### **2012 Château Lynch-Moussas**

The 2012 Château Lynch-Moussas is a modern wine that has allowed the inherent restraint of the vintage to rein it in a bit, which is all to the good. The nose is a blend of cassis, a touch of meatiness, coffee bean, dark soil tones and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit pumped up from its modern style, but with a good core, ripe tannins and pretty good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a modern wine that avoids the 2012 pitfalls of this style- over-extraction, hollow cores, or too much new oak to absorb seamlessly- and really is a pretty good example of the vintage in this more modern guise. 2020-2040. **87.**

### **2012 Le Petit Mouton**

It is a cabernet year at Mouton, with both the *grand vin* and the Petit Mouton primarily made up from this varietal. The 2012 Petit Mouton is comprised of a blend of seventy-nine percent cabernet sauvignon, nineteen percent merlot and two percent cabernet franc, tips the scales at 13.2 percent alcohol and was raised in forty percent new wood. It is the best Petit Mouton I have tasted to date, offering up a new oaky nose of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, gravel and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively vibrant, with a fine core, very good focus and balance and a long, suavely tannic and tangy finish. I really like this wine this year. 2020-2045+. **89+**.

### **2012 Château Mouton-Rothschild**

The 2012 Château Mouton-Rothschild is a very good wine, being comprised of fully ninety percent cabernet sauvignon, eight percent merlot and two percent cabernet franc. It was raised in only seventy percent new oak this year- not a concession to the more elegant style of the 2012 vintage, but rather because the new *chais* includes new large wood fermentation tanks and these were also new oak this year. The wine is complex and classy on the nose, but just a touch overly slick for my pedestrian tastes, as it offers up a blend of cassis, dark berries, coffee bean, a dollop of licorice, dark soil tones and plenty of spicy, smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pure, with really lovely raw materials very much in evidence. The core is deep, the focus and balance here are very fine indeed and there are plenty of ripe, chewy tannins adding grip and potential longevity on the finish, and yet, for some reason, I am left with the impression that the whole this year is a bit less than the sum of its parts. This is a very well-made wine, but it seems to me to be a bit overly sculpted to ever really reach greatness. I miss the more effortless impression of a wine like the 1985 Mouton- which the 2012 vintage might have been able to reproduce flawlessly! 2025-2075. **92**.

### **2012 Aile d'Argent (Mouton-Rothschild's Blanc)**

The 2012 Aile d'Argent is a very pretty and stylish wine and clearly shows what a lovely vintage this is for dry white wines on the Gironde. The blend this year is thirty-seven percent semillon and sixty-three percent sauvignon blanc, which makes the Aile d'Argent quite different from wines such as Pavillon Blanc de Margaux, as it incorporates a substantial percentage of semillon into its *cépages*. The bouquet is deep, complex and wide open, offering up scents of fig, pear, beeswax, grassy tones, a touch of petrol and a deft base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and quite long, with good complexity, fine focus and a bit of youthful wood still in need of incorporation on the classy finish. Like so many of the top white wines in 2012, this wine is quite open and accessible on both the nose and palate, with lovely framing acidity, and once the new wood is fully integrated into the wine, it will drink beautifully. 2014-2022+. **90**.

### **2012 Château Pédesclaux**

The 2012 Château Pédesclaux has turned out very well in this vintage, and is one of the very good values to be found from this year. The deep and refined nose offers up a classic Pauillac blend of cassis, dark berries, espresso, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and a deft touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite precise, with good mid-palate depth, beautiful balance and a long, chewy and nicely transparent finish. Really a lovely example of the vintage. 2020-240. **89**.

### **2012 Château Pibran**

Château Pibran is part of the AXA group and is shown at Pichon-Baron. The 2012 is quite marked by the difficulties of the vintage, as the blend is primarily merlot, seeing as the

cabernet sauvignon was not ideally ripe when the rains came. The harvest here started on October 1<sup>st</sup>, and clearly this is one of those estates that would have really benefitted from a bit of Indian Summer weather in mid-October, rather than the onset of non-stop autumn rains. The nose is not special, offering up scents of black cherries, coffee bean, a green streak from uneven ripeness, tarry tones and new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, but with a modest core and some dry-edged tannins on the short finish. Clearly the team at Pibran has done the best they could, but this is one of those slightly flat, dry-edged and short examples of the vintage. 2018-2028. **80.**

#### **2012 Reserve de la Comtesse**

The golden touch of the Pichon-Lalande team is very much in evidence in the 2012 Reserve de la Comtesse, which comes in at a cool and classy thirteen percent alcohol this year. The lovely and very classy bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a touch of tobacco leaf and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and refined, with a lovely core of fruit, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the potentially silky finish. Just a lovely second wine. 2018-2040. **89+.**

#### **2012 Château Pichon-Lalande**

Château Pichon-Lalande is fortunate to have Nicolas Glumineau now at the head of the day to day operations of the estate, as he has moved over from Château Montrose after the 2011 vintage and has clearly hit the ground running in his first full year at this fabled Pauillac Second Growth! The 2012 Château Pichon-Lalande is clearly one of the three finest wines produced on the Left Bank in this vintage and an utterly classic and refined bottle of young claret. The wine this year is a blend of fifty-nine percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-eight percent merlot, eight percent cabernet franc and five percent petit verdot. The deep, pure and very traditionally-styled nose delivers a superb aromatic constellation of cassis, cark berries, coffee, tobacco leaf, cigar ash, gravel and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly suave and seamless, with a rock solid core, great focus and grip and a long, classy and ripely tannic finish. Think of a wine cut along the lines of the beautiful 1983 Pichon-Lalande, only deeper and even more refined! This is a glorious success and a clear indication that a combination of strict selection and an intuitive sense of the style of the 2012 vintage could produce magic! Do not miss this wine if you love classic claret. 2025-2065. **94+.**

#### **2012 Les Tourelles de Longueville**

The 2012 Les Tourelles de Longueville includes a lot of the merlot that did not make the cut for the *grand vin* this year, with its *cépages* a blend of sixty percent merlot, twenty-eight percent cabernet sauvignon, ten percent cabernet franc and two percent petit verdot. The wine is very ripe and jammy on the nose, delivering a blend of black cherries, black raspberries, dark chocolate, gravel, herb tones and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a modest core and a slightly green edge to its chewy tannins on the finish. The length here is solid, but this wine seems rather precariously balanced and it is hard to imagine it ever rising above the level of “merely good” over the course of its life. 2018-2035+? **85.**

#### **2012 Château Pichon-Longueville**

I have had some reservations in the last year or two about the oak regimen employed for the *grand vin* at Pichon-Baron, as a few of the wines that I really expected to have absorbed their substantial serving of new wood with bottle age (such as the 2001) have instead struggled to carry their lumber and not aged as gracefully as I would have imagined. There is no doubt that the raw materials here are exceptional in most vintages, but I would love to see the estate come



out of the new wood time warp (such high percentages of new wood really are part of the 1990s and early 2000s are now a bit behind the times, IMHO) and really start to place its lovely *terroir* front and center in the wine. In any case, the 2012 Pichon-Baron is comprised of a blend of eighty percent cabernet sauvignon and twenty percent merlot and was raised in eighty percent new wood this year. The bouquet is deep and quite primary, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, gravelly soil tones and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite pure on the attack, with a good core, but a rather rigid backend from wood tannins (coupled to the already substantial skin tannins of this vintage, this is not a particularly promising combination). The finish is focused, very chewy and a bit short. This probably will absorb its new wood over time and eventually become a solid representative of the vintage, but the potential was here to make something really special with a bit more flexibility in the cellar, and the talented team at Pichon-Baron seems to have missed that opportunity in 2012. 2022-2050? **86-89?**

### **2012 Château Pontet-Canet**

Château Pontet-Canet is very good in 2012, but not quite up to the level it was in the previous couple of vintages. One-third of the wine has been aged in concrete “eggs” this year and two-thirds in barrel, with the wine raised in wood being split between new oak and one wine barrels. The harvest here started on October 4<sup>th</sup> and finished up on October 17<sup>th</sup>, with the rain off again and on again throughout most of the duration of the picking. The wine has turned out quite well, but seemed a bit deeper-pitched than normal and almost a touch oxidative (or at least our sample). The very black fruity nose is a mix of dark berries, cassis, a bit of woodsmoke, coffee grounds, a lovely base of dark soil tones, cigar ash and a gentle base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with fine focus and balance, a good core, quite low acidity and a long, moderately tannic finish. This will be a very good bottle, but the 2011 is a cut above. 2019-2040. **89.**

### ***Ste. Estèphe***

*Château Calon-Ségur is the star of the commune here in 2012, but in general, the deeper clay soils of Ste. Estèphe have tended to fair better than some of their Left Bank neighbors to the south on more porous gravel mounds, as the possibility to mitigate the hydric stress of the mid-summer drought was better at many estates here in Ste. Estèphe. Of course, the flip side of this is that it is a bit cooler as well in Ste. Estèphe, so ripening arrives a little later, and the late season rains of 2012 certainly did not favor later ripening vineyards- so Mother Nature gave with one hand and took away with the other in this commune in this vintage. There are changes afoot this year amongst the star estates in Ste. Estèphe, as Madame Gasqueton, who owned Château Calon-Ségur for decades, has passed away and the estate has been sold to the French bank of Crédit Mutuel, who has retained ninety-five percent of the ownership, with the other five percent having been sold to Jean-François Moueix of the Château Pétrus side of the family. Crédit Mutuel had been very smart in engaging the Moueix family to act as their agents and keep an eye out for a meritorious property to add to their portfolio, and Calon-Ségur looks to be the perfect fit. If the stunning 2012 is any indication of what is to come at this property under its new ownership, we are in for a stunning renaissance at Château Calon-Ségur in the coming years! The other great classically styled estate in Ste. Estèphe, Château Montrose, has not enjoyed the same success as Château Calon-Ségur this year, as the late season rains seem to have caught the estate with imperfect ripeness on the vines and the wine, while not too bad, is not at the same superb level of quality as it has been for the last several years. And, once again, the modernist*

*fetish at Château Cos d'Estournel has produced a wine that is utterly charmless to my palate and one is left feeling that the team here was completely clueless how to adapt their regimen to the unique characteristics of the 2012 vintage. The other real standout in the commune this year is Lafon-Rochet, who has made a lovely and very suave example of the vintage and it is a wine that will be one of the great sleepers to be had in 2012.*



*Château Calon-Ségur, where the potential to craft a supremely elegant 2012 was not missed!*

### **2012 Marquis de Calon**

Calon-Ségur is clearly the most successful estate in 2012 in Ste. Estèphe by quite a wide margin, as *Régisseur* Vincent Millet and his team at the estate totally seized the opportunity presented by this vintage to produce classic wines and they have succeeded with their entire range. The second wine, Marquis de Calon, includes much of the younger vine merlot that was not considered refined enough for the *grand vin* this year, with its *cépages* consisting of sixty-nine percent merlot and thirty-one percent cabernet sauvignon. The resulting wine is not bad, but it clearly is functioning as a proper second wine and allowing only the best grapes to go into the blend of Calon-Ségur. The nose on the 2012 Marquis de Calon is a bit riper than the *grand vin*, offering up an aromatic blend of cassis, smoke, tobacco leaf, a touch of boysenberry (from the young vine merlot?), coffee grounds and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch chunky, with a good core, a slightly rustic tannins and pretty good length and grip on the chewy finish. This will need a few years to soften up, but it will be a very good bottle

once it has had a chance to blossom. It does not have the same supreme elegance of the *grand vin* this year, but it also shows the same steady hand of the Calon team. 2018-2040. **88.**

#### **2012 Château Calon-Ségur**

The 2012 Château Calon-Ségur is one of the best four or five wines to be found on the Left Bank in this vintage, clearly more successful than any of the First Growths in this year and a stellar value. The grapes were all harvested between October 1<sup>st</sup> and October 16<sup>th</sup>, with the teams making a serious push to finish up on the latter day, as the autumn rains started in earnest on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Vincent Millet noted that “2012 is really a cabernet sauvignon vintage, and in particular, the old vines really did well this year, so that we had few parcels of the old vines come in with potential alcohol over fourteen percent this year.” The wine ended up at a very respectable 13.5 percent alcohol and is a blend of seventy-eight percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty percent merlot and two percent petit verdot and was raised entirely in new barrels- though the use of new wood here is exemplary in its discretion and understatement and I would never have guessed that this is all new wood this year! The absolutely beautiful nose wafts from the glass in a blend of cassis, black cherries, Cuban tobacco, a touch of pomegranate, espresso, dark soil tones and a very judicious base of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and refined, with a great core of fruit, a youthful and seamless structure, ripe tannins and superb focus and grip on the ripely tannic, complex and very classy finish. This is the epitome of old school claret, with elegance, breed and potential complexity to burn! It is one of the finest young vintages of Château Calon-Ségur I have had the pleasure to taste and a stunning success in this difficult vintage. 2025-2065. **93.**

#### **2012 Château Capbern-Gasqueton**

The 2012 Château Capbern-Gasqueton is a lovely, poised and very refined example of the vintage and clearly one of the great bargains to be had in this vintage. The wine is a blend of two-thirds cabernet sauvignon and one-third merlot, was raised in sixty percent new wood (but shows little signs of oak!) and comes in at a quite classic 13.2 percent alcohol. The bouquet is a classic blend of dark berries, cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and just a hint of nutty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance, ripe tannins and lovely length and grip. This shares the poised and elegant of its big brother, Calon-Ségur, and is an unqualified success in 2012. 2020-2045+. **88+.**

#### **2012 Goulée by Cos d’Estournel**

The 2012 Goulée is a leaden affair, with a density and heavy-handed personality that is quite out of character with the vintage and far from appealing to my palate. The wine is comprised of a blend of sixty percent cabernet sauvignon and forty percent merlot, was raised in thirty percent new barrels and tips the scales just under 13.4 percent- all of which data would suggest a pretty successful example of the vintage. However, the wine is dull and modern, offering up a ripe nose of black raspberries, dark chocolate, cigar ash, resinous tones and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with plenty of raw tannins on the finish, a very dulled personality and pretty good length on the backend that closes with overt notes of coffee grounds. This wine has zero personality and is likely to offer very little pleasure during the course of its life. 2019-2040. **81.**

#### **2012 Les Pagodes de Cos**

The 2012 Les Pagodes de Cos is a twin brother of the Goulée, as the wine is again a blend of sixty percent cabernet sauvignon and forty percent merlot in this vintage. It was raised in a touch more new wood- forty percent, and offers up a very similar, dull, ripely modern nose of black raspberries, tarry tones, Cuban cigars, coffee grounds, leather and plenty of spicy new

oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite dry-edged from the oak, with a dense, dull personality and a short, bitter finish. The extra ten percent of new oak here seems to have dried the finish a bit more than the above, making it even a touch less savory. This is really a poorly-made wine to my palate. 2019-2040. **78.**

#### **2012 Château Cos d'Estournel**

The harvest started here on September 28<sup>th</sup> for the merlot, with the cabernets starting to be collected on October 9<sup>th</sup> and the picking wrapping up on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month. As was the case elsewhere in the Médoc, the team at Cos seems to have preferred their cabernet to their merlot this year, so that the final blend is seventy-five percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-two percent merlot, two percent cabernet franc and one percent petit verdot, and the wine was raised in seventy percent new oak. The alcohol level here is pretty tame by recent standards at Cos, coming in just under 13.8 percent. However, the resulting wine is far from a success in my opinion, as this seems to be the poster child for the school of winemaking in Bordeaux that sought to impose the “house style” over the vintage style this year, and the wine shows bizarrely overripe characteristics on both the nose and palate (no easy thing in the difficult *fin de saison* of 2012!) and really poor wood integration on the backend. The nose is a modern blend of boysenberry jam, chocolate, muddy soil tones, Cuban cigars and plenty of smoky, nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, muddled and bitter on the backend, with a fat core, drying wood tannins and no sense of balance, focus or grace. This is not as over the top as the 2009 Cos, but to my palate, this is a patently out of balance and charmless wine that will never deliver any pleasure over the course of its life. Strange brew. 2020-2045. **70.**

#### **2012 Château Cos d'Estournel Blanc**

Ironically, given how disappointing the range of red wines were at Cos this year, the white wine is by a wide margin the most impressive white wine yet produced at the estate and really a lovely and classy bottle of wine. One hopes that with the change in regime here, some of the elegance and nascent complexity on display in the Cos Blanc will eventually find its way into the red wine program. The wine is a blend of seventy-seven percent sauvignon blanc and twenty-three percent semillon, does not go through malo and does not see any new wood during its *elevage*. Despite the wine coming in at just under fourteen percent alcohol, is bright, fresh and vibrant on both the nose and palate. The fine bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of lime, green apple, fresh figs, a touch of petrol, citrus peel, gentle grassiness and just a whisper of vanilla from the one wine barrels. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely cut and focus, a fine core and a long, zesty and quite impressively refined finish. This is really a lovely wine! 2013-2020+. **92.**

#### **2012 Château Lilian Ladouys**

The 2012 Château Lilian Ladouys has turned out very well indeed and is another superb value in this vintage. The deep, complex and impressively classy nose offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, espresso, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and just a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, round and classy, with a fine core, lovely shape and bounce and very good length and grip on the moderately tannic finish. There is just a touch of proper St. Estèphe chewiness on the backend that should carry this wine well in the cellar. Emmanuel Cruse of Château d'Issan has really done splendid work here since he was brought in a couple of years ago to consult. Fine juice and one of the sleepers of the vintage! 2018-2035.

#### **2012 La Dame de Montrose**

The 2012 La Dame de Montrose received most of the merlot on the estate in this vintage, with its *cépages* made up of seventy-six percent merlot and twenty-four percent cabernet

sauvignon, and was raised in twenty percent new oak in this vintage. At 13.2 percent alcohol, this wine is right in the range of the most successful wines in this vintage, but the wine comes across as just a bit flat on both the nose and palate. The bouquet certainly has plenty of pretty aromatics in its mix of black cherries, dark berries, Cuban cigars, dark soil tones, a touch of coffee bean and just a dollop of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately tannic, with a broad attack, a good core and a long, chewy and slightly flat finish. This is not a bad wine by any stretch of the imagination, and will need several years to start to soften and drink well, but it is not in the league of past vintages of this bottling. 2020-2040+. **87+.**

#### **2012 Château Montrose**

I was expecting the 2012 Château Montrose to really shine in this vintage, but it has not really succeeded as I had hoped and is a bit heavy and charmless this year. Perhaps it will really blossom with bottle age and my initial impression will prove to be overly conservative, but this is a bit flat out of the blocks in 2012. The wine is a blend of fifty-seven percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty-percent merlot, five percent cabernet franc and one percent petit verdot, and was raised in sixty percent new oak. Today the wine is young and quite gangly, but with perhaps some potential to blossom with sufficient bottle age. The bouquet offers up a blend of dark berries, cassis, a touch of resin, dark soil tones and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and powerfully structured, with a fine core, long, tannic and slightly heavy-handed finish. This is classically balanced, but again, a bit flat and lack vibrancy today. Not a great Montrose, but this will age and may get much more interesting with sufficient cellaring. 2030-2060+. **88+?**

#### **2012 Château Lafon-Rochet**

The 2012 Château Lafon-Rochet has turned out splendidly and is one of the top wines in the commune this year. The deep, pure and very shapely wine offers up a classy nose of cassis, dark berries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, nutty new oak and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and very suave on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and impressive length and grip on the beautifully balanced and youthful finish. Clearly there were no issues with hydric stress here this year. Fine juice and a great value. 2020-2040. **90.**

#### **2012 Château Les Ormes de Pez**

The 2012 Château Les Ormes de Pez is a modern and simple wine that is currently a bit dry on the backend from uncovered oak tannins, but probably has the stuffing to resolve them with some bottle age. The nose is a pumped up blend of blackberries, cassis, coffee bean, dark soil tones and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chunky, with the aforementioned dry backend from poorly executed new wood. Give this six or seven years to soak up the oak tannins, and then drink it over the next fifteen to twenty years. It is okay in its style, but not a wine I would put in my own personal cellar. 2019-2035? **85.**

#### **2012 Château Phélan Segur**

Château Phélan Segur is usually the one property I can point to year in and year out and say “here is a Michel Rolland wine that I like,” as it is usually a very restrained and classy version of the Rolland recipe. However, the 2012 wine did not show particularly well at the UGC tasting where I crossed paths with it on this trip (and I did taste from two different samples), as the wine seemed rather flat and over-oaked this year. The nose is not too bad, offering up a scents of dark berries, cassis, Cuban cigars tobacco leaf and plenty of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is flat, full-bodied and chewy, with a pretty good core and sound focus, but some dry oak tannins poking out uncovered on the finish. I would have loved to have had the

opportunity to swing by the estate and taste there- just to make sure that the two samples I tasted were representative- as I am usually more impressed with Phélan Segur than I was this year with the 2012. ???

### **2012 Tronquoy de Sainte Anne**

The team at Montrose and Tronquoy-Lalande clearly was faced with a vintage that was not really up their alley stylistically, and the wines this year are not bad, but not up to the superb quality of the last several years here. The nose on the 2012 Tronquoy de Sainte Anne is very pretty, offering up scents of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, tobacco leaf and coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pretty four-square, with a solid score and a bit of old-fashioned, chewy tannin poking out on the backend. Like all of the wines in the Montrose lineup this year, the wine seems a bit low acid and ponderous, and while it is not bad, there is a spark of vibrancy here that seems to be missing. 2019-2040. **85+**.

### **2012 Château Tronquoy-Lalande**

The 2012 Château Tronquoy-Lalande comes in at 13.2 percent alcohol and is a blend of fifty-seven percent merlot, forty percent cabernet sauvignon, two percent cabernet franc and one percent petit verdot. Forty percent of the production this year was designated for the second wine, Tronquoy Ste. Anne. The wine is certainly more refined on both the nose and palate than the second wine, offering up scents of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, gravel and a nice touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, a bit flat from its low acids, with a good core, ripe tannins and very respectable length and grip on the finish. This is a pretty good effort for the vintage, but it too lacks just a bit of spark on the palate. 2020-2045. **86+**.

## ***Médoc and the Haut-Médoc***

### **2012 Château Beaumont (Haut-Médoc)**

Château Beaumont is owned by Château Beychevelle and for the last several years, this has been one of the very best examples of the appellation that I have tasted. The 2012 Beaumont is lovely, as the fine success that Beychevelle has realized in this vintage is also quite evident in this wine. The superb bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, cassis, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and a touch of dark chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite silky on the attack, with a lovely core, gentle tannins and fine length and grip. This wine will drink beautifully out of the blocks, but should have no difficulties aging twelve to fifteen years. A great value. 2013-2025+. **88**.

### **2012 Château Belgrave (Haut-Médoc)**

The 2012 Château Belgrave is a rather modern wine that seems a bit “over-worked” aromatically, as it offers up scents of sappy cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is fullish and rather hollow at the core, with a chunky, short and quite flat finish that closes with some chewy tannins. This is a low acid and rather linear wine that could not rise above the substantial challenges posed by the difficult *fin de saison* of 2012. 2016-2025. **82**.

### **2012 Château de Camensac (Haut-Médoc)**

Château de Camensac is an emblematic example of just how difficult it was in these cooler soils to produce a complete wine in 2012, as this shows some signs of underripeness on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a blend of dark berries, damp, dark soil tones, a bit of bell pepper, cigar smoke and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, flat and a bit green on the backend with low acids and a short, chewy and four-square finish. It was a tough vintage for folks in the Haut-Médoc and it shows here. 2018-2025+? **82**.

### **2012 Château Cantemerle (Haut-Médoc)**

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

### **2012 Château Citran (Haut-Médoc)**

The 2012 Château Citran is a bit over-extracted this year. The nose is a rather forced blend of cassis, muddy soil tones, cigar ash, a bit of bell pepper and cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, dense and weedy, with some overt signs of uneven ripeness, a solid core and a short, ham-fisted finish that closes with some chewy tannin. Not a whole lot of style points here. 2019-2030+? **80.**

### **2012 Château Coufran (Haut-Médoc)**

Château Coufran falls into the good, but not great camp in 2012, as the wine is not too bad, but cannot escape some of the vagaries of the vintage. The nose is quite nice, offering up a reasonably complex blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and shows a bit of a dip in the mid-palate, with some chewy tannins on the young and still pretty angular finish. This is not too bad and shows a bit of positive grip on the finish, and it should blossom with seven or eight years of bottle age, but it will probably never be a charming wine. 2020-2035+. **85+.**

### **2012 Château Lafitte-Laujac (Haut-Médoc)**

Lafitte-Laujac is the sister property of Château Laujac, which together with Château La Tour de By, has long been one of the two great estates in the far northern Médoc. The property has been owned by the Cruse family for a few generations and it continues to be one of the great, classic, unsung clarets in the Bordeaux landscape. The 2012 Château Lafitte-Laujac is comprised of a blend of sixty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty percent merlot and five percent cabernet franc and was aged in twenty percent new wood. The harvest here started on October 8<sup>th</sup> and most of the grapes were brought in prior to the autumn rains, and the wine tips the scales at a thoroughly ripe 13.5 percent alcohol. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of cassis, black cherries, tobacco leaf, a complex base of gravelly soil tones, a touch of licorice and a deft touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with a lovely core, ripe, suave tannins and a long, vibrant finish. A fine, fine example of the 2012 vintage and a terrific bargain! 2017-2035+. **88+.**

### **2012 Château de La Lagune (Haut-Médoc)**

I finally had the opportunity to visit at Château de La Lagune on this trip and very good things are happening at this fine estate. We tasted through five of the recent vintages here and I realized that I have been extremely remiss in not visiting here each year, as this is really fine and classic winemaking. The 2012 La Lagune is comprised of a blend of sixty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty percent merlot and ten percent cabernet franc (from vines around sixty years of age). The wine was raised in fifty percent new wood and tips the scales at a cool thirteen percent alcohol this year. The bouquet is deep, black fruity and impressively pure, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, coffee bean, a touch of violet, dark soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a fine core, velvety tannins and

very good length and grip on the focused and classic finish. This is a superb example of the 2012 vintage and a top-notch La Lagune. 2020-2045+. **90.**

#### **2012 Château de Lamarque (Haut-Médoc)**

The 2012 Château de Lamarque is not too bad on the nose, but it shows some signs of uneven ripeness on the palate. The bouquet is a blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones and a bit of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and fairly tarry in personality, with some dry tannins (from both skins and oak) on the backend, and a borderline note of bitterness on the close of the finish. Some bottle age will help here, but this is never going to be a charming example of the vintage, as there were seemingly just too many obstacles to hurdle here in 2012. 2020-2030+. **83.**



#### **2012 Chapelle de Potensac (Médoc)**

Bizarrely, the 2012 Chapelle de Potensac is my favorite wine in the entire lineup of wines I tasted at Leoville Las Cases this year! This is a very pretty wine (that has not lost the inherent elegance of the vintage through over-extraction), as it offers up a stylish nose of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, a very nice base of soil, fresh herbs, roses and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full and quite suave on the attack, with a good core and a bit of chewy tannin perking up the well-balanced finish. This is quite tasty, but will need at least three or four years to drop a bit of tannin. 2016-2030+. **87.**



**2012 Château Potensac (Médoc)**

The 2012 Château Potensac is quite a bit more extracted than the second wine and is a tad less interesting as a result. The nose is a rather dense blend of black cherries, cassis, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, a touch of eucalyptus and new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really pretty over-extracted, with a sound core and a long, chewy and dry-edged finish. This will probably resolve with bottle age, but what is the point of taking a vintage with such inherent elegance and trying to pump it up with so much extraction in the first place? 2020-2040. **85.**

**2012 Château Sénéjac (Haut-Médoc)**

The 2012 Château Sénéjac is a lovely example of the vintage, though it is a touch on the low acid side and does come across as missing just a touch of vibrancy as a result. The wine is a blend of forty-eight percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty-seven percent merlot, eleven percent cabernet franc and two percent petit verdot this year and offers up a very stylish bouquet of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, tobacco leaf and a gentle base of new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and nicely reserved, with a good core, a fair bit of ripe tannin and very good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is a very good result for a consistently fine property. 2016-2030+. **86+.**

**2012 Château La Tour de By (Médoc)**

The 2012 Château La Tour de By has turned out very well indeed and is once again, one of the great bargains of the vintage! The deep and classically old school nose offers up scents of dark berries, black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, tobacco leaf and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and structurally, quite sturdy, with an excellent core of fruit, ripe tannins and impressive length and grip on the focused and chewy finish. This will be a lovely wine with sufficient bottle age and really puts to shame dozens and dozens of higher-priced and less interesting wines on the Left Bank! 2020-2040. **89+.**

**2012 Château La Tour Carnet (Haut-Médoc)**

I used to really like the wines from Château La Tour Carnet back in the decade of the 1980s, but they have been spoofing their wines for many years now and this technique seems to have been patently unsuitable for the vintage conditions of 2012. The nose is a modern hodge-podge of black raspberries, cassis, cigar ash, just a whisper of soil and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, flat on the attack and hollow at the core, with a serious wall of dry tannin that cuts short the charmless and precariously balanced finish. 2018-2025+? **80.**

**IN MEMORY OF HENRI KRUG  
GUIDING FORCE AT CHAMPAGNE KRUG FOR FORTY YEARS**



In the month of March of this year, Henri Krug passed away peacefully in his hometown of Reims. Monsieur Krug was seventy-six years of age at the time of his passing. Henri Krug was the president of Krug Champagne during one of its most dynamic eras, joining his father, Paul Krug II at the family-run Champagne house in 1962, and ascending to the position of President in 1977 and overseeing the fine domaine up until his semi-retirement in 2002. Even after he retired from the day-to-day oversight of the house, he remained a vibrant force at Krug, participating in the “Tasting Committee” on a full-time basis for many years and serving as one of the valuable links with the previous generation at Krug. During the course of his career as President of Krug, Henri worked hand in hand with his younger brother, Rémi Krug, in championing the exceptional quality of their Champagnes and forever pursuing new horizons of excellence for the venerable house. Over the course of Henri and Rémi Krug’s leadership of the domaine, Krug introduced their first bottling of Brut Rosé in 1985, and bottled their first single vineyard wine, the Clos du Mesnil bottling of Blanc de Blancs in the 1979 vintage. This was a very dynamic time in the history of Maison Krug, for in the early years of the decade of the 1970s, the house undertook to purchase vineyard land for the first time in its history (having been previously content to work with long-term contracts with growers in the region), purchasing six hectares of chardonnay vines in the village of Mesnil-sur-Oger (which included the Clos du Mesnil) and augmenting this with an additional nine hectares of pinot noir vineyards purchased in the village of Aÿ a few years later. Today, Champagne Krug owns fully twenty hectares of

their own vineyard land, including the tiny Clos de Ambonnay parcel which was purchased in 1994 and which produces the eponymous second single vineyard wine in the Krug lineup.

During the two brothers' era at Champagne Krug, each sibling harnessed their talents to cover different aspects of the production and marketing of the world's greatest Champagne. Henri, as President, remained based in Reims and was in charge of the production side of the business, including making the wines, acting as the chief liaison with the growers the house worked with on a long-term basis and chairing the very important "tasting committee" responsible for each year's blend of the house's flagship wine, Krug Grande Cuvée. As he noted in an interview in Decanter in 2003, soon after his retirement, despite the constant requirements of travel, budgeting and the day to day financial responsibilities of leading a Grande Marque, "it was always the production side that I was most passionate about." Rémi, as Managing Director, focused on the marketing side of the business, tirelessly crisscrossing the globe to introduce wine lovers the beauty of Krug Champagne, while of course also participating in the tasting committee when his duties found him in Reims. This division of labor perfectly suited the personalities of the two Krug brothers, as Rémi was the more outgoing of the two, while the more reserved and shy Henri was most at home overseeing the day to day operations of the Champagne house—meticulously overseeing the critical blending process at Krug that provides the institutional link of each new release with the historical legacy of the past great wines to have issues forth from these small cellars in Reims since the house's founding in 1843. By all accounts, Henri Krug was a great taster and possessed one of the finest palates in Champagne, and it was his uncompromising attention to every detail during his tenure at the head of the tasting committee that saw the quality of Krug Champagnes universally recognized as at the very pinnacle of quality in the region. Most importantly, during the course of his career, Henri Krug was also the chief winemaker at the domaine, producing the hundreds of different still wines that would eventually become the building blocks for the various blended Champagne cuvées. When the family-led domaine began to consider a successor for Henri Krug as chief winemaker, they brought in the very talented Eric Lebel as *Chef de Cave* in 1998 to work alongside of Henri for several years before the reins of chief winemaker were passed on.

During Henri Krug's tenure as President of Champagne Krug, the house also saw its transition from a family-owned business into that of a crown jewel in a luxury goods conglomerate, as the maison was first purchased by the large wine and spirits firm of Rémy-Martin 1977 and eventually by Louis-Vuitton-Moët-Hennessy in 1999. During the course of these changes, Henri Krug was instrumental in safeguarding the traditions at Champagne Krug and ensuring that the family's five generation-long commitment to excellence at any cost was not lost in the various vagaries of corporate existence that arose on the horizon from time to time. The Krug family continues to play an instrumental role in the leadership of the house under the auspices of LVMH, as Henri's son, Olivier Krug continues on as the sixth generation of the family to help set the course for this superb estate, having joined the maison in 1989 and currently serving as its House Director. This sense of continuity from generation to generation at Champagne Krug has run deep since here since Joseph Krug first opened his own house in 1843, and Henri Krug was quick to point out in the 2003 Decanter interview that he learned his winemaking techniques from both his grandfather and father in his formative years at Krug. This historical continuity between generations at Krug was quite evident as Henri commented upon a deep vertical tasting of Krug bottlings that he presided over in 1993, which stretched all the way

back to vintages in the 1920s- with some wines made by each of the previous three Krug generations – and where attendees at this landmark tasting “agreed that it was a remarkable Krug style all the way through” and each wine very much cut from the same stylistic cloth, which “made me immensely proud.”

This sense of historical continuity will continue on at Krug in the wake of the passing of Henri Krug this spring, but there is little doubt that his presence at this *Grande Marque* will be missed now and well into the future. It is some consolation to everyone that cherishes the beautiful quality and extremely long lives of Krug Champagne that the beautiful wines that Henri Krug crafted during his long career will viscerally carry on his legacy to any who have been fortunate enough to cellar the wines he crafted here between 1962 and his official retirement in 2002, as the legacy of these beautiful wines will carry on for a long, long time into the future. Henri Krug lived seventy-six years and spent his forty years here immersed in the life at Krug Champagne, imbuing it with a passion for excellence and it is sad to think that he will no longer be able to add his personal link with the past at Krug when the tasting committee meets again over the coming months to fashion the next iteration of Grande Cuvée. For up until his passing, he could still be seen occasionally dropping in on the tasting committee to check on the progress of the next bottling of the estate’s flagship wine and adding his experienced voice to the discussions of how the new blend should be crafted. As his son, Olivier Krug, noted at the time of his father’s passing, “it is always too early” when one loses a loved one, but, “my father added so much during his career to our team here at Krug and Krug lovers the world over, that I have no fear that his memory will last even longer than his Champagnes.” Of this, there is little doubt. Let us raise a glass to Henri Krug and his spirit that infused so many great bottlings of Krug with that certain *je ne sais quoi* that differentiates the wines of Krug from all the other great wines of the world.

