

# VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

*March-April 2017*

*Number Sixty-Eight*

- ❖ *Gérard Boulay- Chavignol's Unsung Star For Very Long-Lived and Beautiful Sancerre.* (pages 1-19)
- ❖ *An Evening of 2004 Baroli With Tom Hyland at La Pizza Fresca.* (pages 20-27)
- ❖ *The Foucault Family's Clos Rougeard- Is the First Growth In Saumur-Champigny Ready To Change Hands After Eight Generations?* (pages 28-46)
- ❖ *The Legendary 1959 Bordeaux Vintage- Ripe, Classic and Timeless.* (pages 47-60)
- ❖ *A Taste For Campania's Beautiful and Ageworthy White Wines.* (pages 61-75)
- ❖ *Domaine des Billards' Old Vine Clos des Billards- Saint Amour For the Ages.* (pages 76-85)
- ❖ *Another Nod To the Maestro of Piemonte- Bruno Giacosa In the Autumn of a Great Career.* (pages 86-101)
- ❖ *Part Two of the Annual Spanish and Portuguese Wine Report.* (pages 102-154)

## *Coming Attractions*

- ❖ *Cathy Corison's Understated and Utterly Refined Rutherford Bench Cabernets.*
- ❖ *The Bi-Annual Champagne Report.*
- ❖ *François Cotat's Superb, Old School and Very Long-Lived Sancerres (Rosé Too).*
- ❖ *Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils' Classically-Styled Red Burgundy.*
- ❖ *Anselme Selosse of Champagne Jacques Selosse- Paving the Way in Avize.*
- ❖ *Ric Forman's Iconic Winemaking Career, The 2016 German Vintage, Château Pichon-Lalande, Great White Burgundy, The Hill of Corton, Champagne Bruno Paillard, Nicole Chanrion, Château Ausone, Domaine Drouhin in Oregon Celebrates Thirty Years, Off the Beaten-Path Italian Wines, Château Montrose, More 2015 Burgundy, Special Club, The 1971 Bordeaux Vintage, New Releases and Great Old Classics From American Wine Country.*

View From the Cellar is published bi-monthly by John Gilman, who is solely responsible for its content. Electronic subscriptions are available for \$120 per year (\$220 for two years), available at [www.viewfromthecellar.com](http://www.viewfromthecellar.com). Inquiries may also be emailed to [john@viewfromthecellar.com](mailto:john@viewfromthecellar.com). Copyright 2017 by John B. Gilman, all rights reserved. Content may be utilized by members of the wine trade and/or media as long as either View From the Cellar or John Gilman are fully credited. Please do not share.

**DOMAINE GÉRARD BOULAY'S  
UTTERLY CLASSICAL CHAVIGNOL SANCERRES**



Gérard Boulay is one of the great producers in the village of Chavignol, which is the epicenter of Sancerre's finest *terroirs*. Here in Chavignol, the profound base of Kimmeridgian limestone surfaces to create the soaring hillside vineyards for which the village is famous. Chavignol lies a couple of kilometers west of the town of Sancerre, nestled at the base of the steep hill that houses the village's most famous vineyards of Monts Damnés, Clos de Beaujeu and Grande Côte (which actually carries across the village boundary into the neighboring village of Amigny). The only other wine-producing areas where this band of limestone reaches up to the surface to fully define the underlying soil of the corresponding vineyards is in the slope of grand crus in Chablis and in parts of the Aube section of Champagne. After these three locales, the next notable surfacing of Kimmeridgian limestone is across the English Channel at the White Cliffs of Dover. There are fourteen villages today (and three small hamlets) that comprise the appellation of Sancerre, but Chavignol has long been recognized as the finest of the villages in the

appellation, and in fact, it was in Chavignol's towering slopes that the sauvignon blanc first acquired hegemony in Sancerre, as the vast majority of vineyards up until the late nineteenth century here were devoted to red grape varieties. But the local *vignerons* recognized several centuries prior that the *terroir* of Chavignol reached its apogee when combined with white grapes, and sauvignon blanc took root as the dominant grape in the limestone soils of Chavignol hundreds of years before it became the standard bearer of the appellation in general in the wake of phylloxera. The first recorded mentions of the sauvignon blanc grape in Chavignol date back to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

The Boulay family has been farming grapes in the village of Chavignol since the late fourteenth century, as the family can trace their history back to when Jean Boulay settled in the village in 1380, so the Boulays intimately knows these limestone hillsides and the beautiful wines that they produce. The domaine now farms nine hectares of vines in the village of Chavignol and Amigny, with eight of these located on the hillsides up above the town and only one hectare on the flatter sections on the western edge of the village. The large Kimmeridgian limestone ridge that houses these three great vineyards lies to the north and west of the village center, with a variety of expositions, with the vineyard of Monts Damnés found on the northern half of the ridge, towering up immediately from the streets of Chavignol and facing primarily due south. As the ridge continues to the west of the center of town, one comes to the Culs de Beaujeu or Clos de Beaujeu, which faces northwesterly and consequently is the coolest of the famous microclimates on this Kimmeridgian ridge. Just to the south of Clos de Beaujeu (and southwest of the village of Chavignol) is the third great vineyard on Kimmeridgian limestone, La Côte d'Amigny (made famous by the Cotat family, who label their wine from here as La Grande Côte), which as the name implies, actually lies just over the border in the neighboring village of Amigny and shares a due south exposition with les Monts Damnés. I should note that the three most famous vineyards on the limestone ridge occupy a significant portion of the arable land here, they are not the only vineyards on the ridge- just the finest and most famous. Other vineyards on the slope include les Cheneaux, les Luneaux and Chavignolet. While there are also some other outstanding vineyards to be found in other parts of Sancerre, in particular in the village of Bué, most *vignerons* will acknowledge that the massive Kimmeridgian ridge here that houses these three great vineyards is where the very highest expressions of Sancerre can be found. And the Boulay family has parcels in all of these finest *terroirs*.

These days, Gérard Boulay is just starting to be assisted by his son, Thibaut Boulay, who besides his duties as a part-time *vigneron* also holds a doctorate in history and is the author of a fine recent book on the village and its beautiful wines, [Le Vignoble de Chavignol](#), upon which I have drawn heavily for much of the historical detail included here. Chavignol has long been recognized for the quality of its *terroir* and how well this is suited to the sauvignon blanc grape, and after the devastation of phylloxera, when the Sancerre region was replanted early in the twentieth century, it was the success of Chavignol's white wines that led *vignerons* in Sancerre to plant sauvignon blanc so widely across the vast majority of the region's vineyards and the modern day appellation of Sancerre was born. In fact, according to Thibaut Boulay, when the INAO was initially petitioning to create the appellation in the 1930s, the first suggestion for the name of the appellation was "Chavignol" for the region's wines, but the villagers rejected this and the larger community of Sancerre eventually gave its name to the appellation. Like most of the great wine-producing regions of France, the church played an integral role in the propagation

of the vine in Sancerre in the middle ages and the Cathedral of Saint Étienne in the city of Bourges held sway over the vineyard lands in the villages of Bué and Chavignol as far back as the Carolingian times (Ninth Century) and used the wine from their vineyards here for sacramental purposes, in addition to keeping the ecclesiastical table very well-supplied at dinner for many centuries. It is likely that the eventual hegemony of white grapes in the vineyards here was partially influenced by the benefits of serving a white sacramental wine and easing the cleaning of ceremonial chalices at the cathedral. The clerics at Saint Étienne continued to own the entirety of the Clos de Beaujeu into the fifteenth century, and the name of this vineyard at that time was actually the “Clos de Chavignol”.

Despite the Boulay family having farmed the steep hillsides of Chavignol for many centuries, Gérard Boulay is really the first generation of his family to go about selling all of his wines commercially in bottle, and the domaine has been selling the vast majority of its production under their own name only since 1990. Prior to this time, the Boulays only bottled a small percentage of their wines and sold off the rest to *négociants*. Gérard joined his father, Louis Boulay in 1972 and worked alongside of his father up through the 1985 vintage. As he noted, one of his first projects after he joined his father in 1972 was to replant many of the domaine’s vineyards, so that virtually all of the property’s vineyards today date back to the early 1970s. In Louis Boulay’s day, he would typically bottle about five thousand bottles of wine a year for himself and his small coterie of private clients, with the wines he bottled hailing entirely from the Clos de Beaujeu. Louis Boulay was a very traditional *vigneron*, with all of his wines fermented back in the day in old, six hundred liter casks in the style of the Cotats, and this practice Gérard inherited from his father and he continued to barrel-ferment some of his own wines once he took over the direction of the estate on his own in 1985. However, at first, when the estate was transitioning from selling off much of its production to *négociants* to estate bottling the lion’s share of their production, Gérard was not systematic with his use of barrel fermentation and rather used his handful of old casks to augment his stainless steel tanks and there was no set program on what would be fermented in cask. It was not until the 1995 vintage that he began to more systematically use barrel fermentation for his top wines, adopting the program he uses today of utilizing older, three hundred liter barrels for the fermentation of many of his crus, with a percentage of each continuing on its *elevage* in cask, while another part of the cuvée goes into stainless steel tanks to be raised prior to blending of the two components ahead of the bottling in the July following the vintage. But, Gérard notes that there are still no hard and fast rules in this regard, so that in some vintages, the Monts Damnés might be fermented in older three hundred liter barrels, but then raised in his father’s older *foudres*, whereas in other vintages, the initial fermentation might take place in stainless steel and then the *elevage* done in the three hundred liter casks. It all has to do with how he feels a particular vintage or cuvée will best be crafted and this changes each and every year.

As I mentioned above, Domaine Boulay farms nine hectares of vines in the village of Chavignol, with eight of these on the Kimmeridgian outcroppings that tower above the village. Amongst their eight hectares of hillside vineyards, they own a 1.3 hectare parcel right in the heart of the ancient Clos de Beaujeu, which is how they continue to label this wine, though the vineyard today is generally known as the Culs de Beaujeu. Gérard Boulay also makes several other “cru bottlings” of Sancerre from his other top parcels, including cuvées of Monts Damnés, La Côte and La Comtesse, as well as a superb blended Sancerre “Chavignol” from a variety of

different parcels in the hillsides above the village. All of the Boulay vineyards are farmed organically and like his neighbors, Edmund Vatan and the Cotat cousins, Gérard Boulay crops at a very low level by the standards of contemporary Sancerre, with the crus routinely cropped between forty-five and fifty hectoliters per hectare, depending on the vintage. The “Chavignol” bottling is produced from slightly higher yields, but hardly exorbitant, as yields for these parcels are generally in the fifty to sixty hectoliter per hectare range. The age of the vines in the Boulay parcels are all fairly old, with most now between forty and fifty years of age and the parcels that comprise the La Comtesse bottling ranging from fifty-five to seventy-five years of age. Monsieur Boulay noted at a recent vertical tasting here in New York that “one important difference between us and François Cotat is our date of harvest, as we have typically started picking a couple of weeks ahead of François, though with climate change, he is now starting to pick around the same time as we do in the last couple of vintages!”



*Gérard Boulay overseeing the set-up of our vertical Clos de Beaujeu tasting in New York.*

Of the “cru bottlings” from Gérard Boulay, the one I now have the most experience with is his Clos de Beaujeu, as the domaine and their importer, Doug Polaner put together an amazing vertical tasting of this bottling in March of this year here in New York, with the vast majority of vintages coming from Doug’s personal cellar. This is the largest volume “cru” bottlings from Domaine Boulay, as the family only owns a hectare and a third of vines in the Clos de Beaujeu, which are situated in the ancient heart of this well-known Chavignol vineyard. The section where

their vines are located in the greater Culs de Beaujeu was where the Cathedral of Saint Étienne once had their vines and it is this part of the vineyard that is the most historic and was known in ancient times as the Clos de Beaujeu- hence the Boulay family's preference for labeling their wine with the historical name. This was one of the first two "cru bottlings" produced by Domaine Boulay, as the family has had vines here for several generations, and the first vintage bottled on its own and labeled as such from the Clos de Beaujeu was the 1982 vintage by Louis Boulay. But, as I mentioned above, back before the domaine was selling a large percentage of its wine in bottle, the small percentage of their crop that they chose to bottle for themselves and friends was always from the Clos de Beaujeu, though labeled simply as "Chavignol" on the label, as one can see from the photograph of the 1959 at the start of this article.

In the same vintage of 1982, Louis and Gérard Boulay also began to bottle their Monts Damnés on its own, as these vines had come into the family from Gérard's wife's family when they were married. The parcels that makes up the Monts Damnés amount to about the same size as the domaine's plot in the Clos de Beaujeu, but there are four plots of vines in the vineyard that make up this bottling. Gérard Boulay notes that "the four parcels all share the same geology and exposition and the major difference is one of vine age, as there is one section of vines that is twenty-five years of age, whereas most of the others are forty-five years old and the average is probably forty." The other two crus in the domaine's portfolio, La Côte and La Comtesse, did not start to be produced until more recent times, with the first vintage of La Comtesse bottled in 2005 and La Côte for the first time in the 2010 vintage. The La Comtesse is an historically famous subplot in the heart of the larger Monts Damnés. This *lieu à dit* is located in the lower middle third of the slope, adjacent to and just to the west of the Clos la Néore made famous by Edmund Vatan, and this *lieu à dit* has been singled out for several centuries as producing the most elegant and refined wines from the Monts Damnés. This is the smallest of the cru bottlings from Domaine Boulay, as the family began renting two small plots of vines here in 2005, the combined size of which is only forty *ares*. The Boulay's La Côte cuvée will eventually be produced from fifty-five *ares* of vines the family cultivates in this great vineyard in Amigny, with some of these rented and some owned by the Boulay family, though the Boulay's own vines here are still too young to go into the cru bottling.

In the cellars, Gérard Boulay works very traditionally, with all of his wines fermented solely with indigenous yeasts. Typically, the white wines here do not go through malolactic fermentation, with rare exceptions, such as 2001, when the Clos de Beaujeu did go through a full malo. The Chavignol bottling is vinified and aged in stainless steel. The cru bottlings are fermented in a variety of methods (as mentioned above), though mostly one can expect that they will be barrel-fermented in the older, three hundred liter casks and aged in a combination of barrel, *foudres* and tank prior to bottling without filtration. The goal in the Boulay cellars is not to find hard and fast rules for the wines, but rather to be flexible and understand how the stylistic parameters of each growing season might best be harnessed in the cellars to bring the finest expression of a given year and *terroir* forth in bottle. The Chavignol is typically the first cuvée released into the market each year, with the crus following a few months later. While all of Gérard Boulay's bottlings age gracefully, in the classic manner of wines from this village, it is the cru bottlings that have the longest lives and it is really a pity to drink them until they have at least a serious handful of years' worth of bottle age on them. As the notes below will attest, they age very, very long, with potential longevity that is perhaps every bit as real as is found in the



wines from the Cotats and Edmund Vatan, and there was not a single vintage in our vertical of Clos de Beaujeu (going all the way back to the 1959!) that was even teetering on the brink of over the hill. Clearly, the wines of Domaine Boulay deserve to be ranked right up at the pinnacle of Sancerre producers, alongside of the Cotat cousins and Monsieur Vatan, and given that today their prices are decidedly lower than the wines from those fines estates, they offer up extraordinary value at the present time.

Traditionally, one of the rather dramatic differences between the wines of Gérard Boulay and those of his more famous neighbors in Chavignol, Edmond Vatan, and the cousins, François Cotat and Pascal Cotat has to do with the timing of the harvest at each domaine. Monsieur Boulay has never been a particularly late harvester, which is in notable contrast to these other three domaines, who have traditionally harvested at least a couple of weeks later than other domaines in the village. However, like the Cotats and Monsieur Vatan, Gérard Boulay has always been meticulous in keeping his yields low, so that the expressions of underlying minerality in his wines is very much akin to that in the wines from these other three, more famous Chavignol domaines. So the Boulay wines have never possessed quite the same inherent power out of the blocks of the Vatan or Cotat wines (and almost never have any residual sugar), which also gives them the benefit of being a bit more approachable out of the blocks, when a young Vatan or François Cotat wine can still be rather monolithic and bound up in its structure. Pascal Cotat's wines tend to also be a bit more forward in personality out of the blocks, as he uses all stainless steel tanks for his fermentations and *elevage* of his wines, so the Pascal wines will have a bit more power from the later harvesting, but less inaccessibility from youthful structure when the wines are young. However, as Monsieur Boulay has tended to barrel-ferment more and more of his cru bottlings in recent vintages, as well as allowing at least a percentage of their *elevage* to take place in older wood, they are texturally often more akin to the wines from François Cotat or Edmond Vatan these days (both of which always barrel ferment their wines) than they are to Pascal Cotat, and for this reason, I would place them stylistically as right in the middle between the completely traditional, but later harvested wines from François Cotat and Edmond Vatan and the stainless steel-raised wines from Pascal Cotat. However, as I mentioned above, at least François Cotat has moved to start picking earlier in the last few years, concluding that global warming is making later picking less of an advantage than what it was in the times of his father and uncle, so the distinctions may become less apparent in coming years.

### ***Gérard Boulay's Sancerre "Chavignol"***

The Chavignol bottling from Gérard Boulay is his largest volume wine, as fully the production of four hectares of the family's vines are used for this cuvée. As I mentioned above, this wine is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel tanks, rather than older casks, but it too is built for at least mid-term aging and has a fine track record for relative longevity. My gut instinct is that the wine ages far longer than I initially anticipate each year when the new vintage is released, as prior to this article, I have not had too many chances to taste this wine with some extended bottle age, but as this is after all mostly culled from other hillside vineyards in Chavignol, planted to equally old vines to most of the crus in the Boulay lineup, there is no reason to assume that it will not age quite long and gracefully.

### **2014 Sancerre “Chavignol”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2014 Chavignol bottling from Monsieur Boulay is aging very beautifully, as it retains all of the verve and vibrant bounce of youth, while starting to offer up more generosity with the passing of time. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a lovely blend of gooseberry, lime blossoms, really stylish notes of fresh-mown grass, chalky minerality, just a whisper of remaining white pepper of youth and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core, fine mineral drive, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the well-balanced and zesty finish. This is very high class Sancerre, but of course, it is Chavignol! 2017-2035. **91+**.

### **2012 Sancerre “Chavignol”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2012 vintage of Chavignol from Domaine Boulay is now fully blossomed at age five, offering up lovely secondary layers of complexity in its bouquet of lime, tangerine, wet stone minerality, gentle botanicals, fresh tarragon, incipient notes of beeswax and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is very deep, full-bodied, bright and complex, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, refined and fully mature finish. I love when the wines of Chavignol make that transition from grassy tones to more Chartreuse-like notes of botanicals and this 2012 has now made that voyage. Superb juice. 2017-2030+. **92**.





### **2010 Sancerre “Chavignol”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The Boulay 2010 Chavignol bottling is also fully mature now, but still fresh and vibrant, with a fine spine of energy and lovely mineral drive on the palate. The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of candied lemon peel, fresh lime, tangerine, wet stones, discreet notes of beeswax, gentle smokiness and just a passing nod to the botanicals of Chavignol. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully mineral in profile, with a good core, lovely cut and grip and a very long, poised and complex finish. This is starting to transition into a tertiary stage of development, with a bit less fruit presence on the palate and far more minerality defining the wine. A lovely bottle and still with plenty of life ahead of it! 2017-2025. **91.**

### **2008 Sancerre “Chavignol”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

Gérard Boulay’s 2008 Chavignol bottling is also drinking beautifully today, as it nears its tenth birthday it is in its prime and hitting on all cylinders. The nose delivers a marvelous combination of candied lime peel, tangerine, still a bit of gooseberry, chalky minerality, a touch of beeswax, spring flowers and just a whisper remaining in the upper register of its earlier grassiness. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and beautifully focused, with a good core, fine soil signature, lovely acids and fine grip on the long, complex and fully mature finish. This was always as touch leaner vintage than 2010 and this shows in the wine today, but the wine remains at its peak of maturity and has plenty of life still ahead of it. 2017-2025. **90.**

### ***Gérard Boulay’s Sancerre “Monts Damnés”***

As mentioned above, the domaine’s four parcels that provides the grapes for the Monts Damnés bottling make up one of the original “crus” in their lineup, as these vines originated with Madame Boulay’s family and arrived in the domaine’s vineyard portfolio in the spring of 1982 and the wine was bottled on its own that autumn. In total the four well-placed parcels total 1.3 hectares, with all sharing the due south exposition of this fine *lieu à dit*. The vineyard total does not include the forty *ares* of vines that the Boulay family also rents in La Comtesse (a subplot of Monts Damnés), as the 1.3 hectares are all owned by the Boulay family and devoted to the Monts Damnés cru bottling from the domaine. These days, this wine is most often barrel-fermented in the older, smaller casks in the Boulay family’s cellars and then raised in a combination of these same barrels and stainless steel tanks, though as mentioned above, this can always vary a bit based on the style of a particular growing season. It is a classic example of the vineyard, with plenty of green and yellow fruit tones in youth, along with gentle grassiness and fine, complex minerality. With bottle age, the fruit tones become more candied, notes of beeswax and licorice start to emerge and the fresh-mown grass gets more botanical and starts to recall Chartreuse in style. I only have a recent note on the 2015 vintage of Monts Damnés, but have enjoyed every example of Boulay Monts Damnés that I have had the pleasure to taste previously, dating back to the 2005 vintage that I first tasted all the way back in 2007. This is a top flight cru bottling and strikes me as extremely ageworthy, though I have yet to drink any really older vintages and confirm this in the glass.

### **2015 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2015 Monts Damnés is a very pretty wine from the Boulay family, offering up fine ripe and succulent fruit tones, a good base of soil and lovely depth and length on the palate. The complex bouquet is a classic and very pure blend of gooseberry, tart orange, fresh-cut grass, chalky soil tones, a bit of petrol and a nice touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely transparency, sound

framing acids and impressive length and grip on the vibrant and still quite primary finish. This does not have the same cut as the 2014, but it is still very nicely balanced and will have no trouble aging at least over the mid-term. 2017-2025+. **91+**.

### ***Gérard Boulay's Sancerre "La Côte"***

The Boulay family's version of La Côte was first bottled in the 2010 vintage, as Gérard was able to both buy a parcel of vines here in this famous vineyard in Amigny and rent another small plot, so that today the family has around fifty-five *ares* of vines to work with in this great *terroir*. However, as the parcel that the domaine purchased has just been planted (the vines were in *friche* when purchased and are only four years old right now and not yet used in the La Côte bottling), this is currently the very smallest of the four cru bottlings from the Boulay family. The fifteen *ares* that they are renting are not really old vines by the domaine's standards, as these are only twelve years old right now, so this cuvée *chez* Boulay is still in its infancy and is destined for still greater things as the vines in both parcels mature. As Gérard Boulay mentioned regarding their bottling of La Côte, "we did not call our bottling *La Grande Côte* out of respect to the Cotat family," as they are really the ones who made this vineyard famous and La Grande Côte is really a name that they created for their bottling. As I noted in the historical section of this piece, the La Côte vineyard lies on the same Kimmeridgian hillside as Monts Damnés and Clos de Beaujeu, but further to the southwest of these two vineyards and over the border in the village of Amigny. On many maps of the vineyards in the region, the name of the vineyard is printed as La Côte d'Amigny. With its due south exposition, this is another fairly warm microclimate, and perhaps with the full establishment of climate change, the Clos de Beaujeu and its northwesterly exposition will prove to be the finest of the three famous Kimmeridgian vineyards on the ridge to adapt to the sad changes in our environment. As is the case with the Monts Damnés, I only have a recent note on the 2015 Domaine Boulay La Côte bottling, but have liked each and every example I have tasted since the debut vintage of 2010.

### **2015 Sancerre "La Côte"- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2015 La Côte from Monsieur Boulay handles the ripeness of the vintage beautifully and offers up a very classic expression of minerality to go along with the beautifully pure and deep fruit tones. The nose is a lovely youthful constellation of lemon, gooseberry, chalky minerality, orange blossoms and a very discreet topnote of grassiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, very nicely balanced and zesty finish. I do not know if this will make really old bones, given how warm the growing season of 2015 was in France, but this is still a young wine and could do with at least a modicum of bottle age to blossom more completely. A beautiful wine in the making. 2018-2025+. **92+**.

### ***Gérard Boulay's Sancerre "La Comtesse"***

The La Comtesse bottling from Domaine Boulay is another relatively recent addition to the lineup, having first been bottled *chez* Boulay in the 2005 vintage. The family has two small parcels in La Comtesse, with one lying right along the border with Clos la Néore and adjacent to the old vines of Monsieur Vatan across the boundary, and the other a bit further into the center of the La Comtesse vineyard. Like all of the other crus at Domaine Boulay, the La Comtesse is usually fermented in older, three hundred liter casks with indigenous yeasts and spends its *elevage* in a combination of these old barrels and stainless steel tanks, prior to its bottling in the

July following the vintage. As I noted above, for centuries, the wines from La Comtesse have been celebrated amongst the Chavignol *cognoscenti*, for their elegance and delicacy, as it was long recognized that the *lieux à dits* further up on the slope produced more powerful expressions of Chavignol Sancerre, while the sheltered aspect of La Comtesse lower down the slope allowed for more refinement in the wines of this parcel. The vineyard takes its name from the Comtesse de Montalivet, Adélaïde de Saint-Germain, who was the wife of Napoleon's Minister of the Interior at the peak of the first empire in the 1820s and who owned fifty-five *ares* of vines in this *lieu à dit*. Prior to it becoming La Comtesse (or the Clos de la Comtesse) in the early nineteenth century, the vineyard was known as Les Vignes Blanches, and was equally prized. The Cathedral of Saint Étienne in Bourges also had vines in La Comtesse, in addition to owning the Clos de Beaujeu, at the peak of their period of vineyard ownership in Chavignol. Again, I only have a recent note on the 2015 Boulay La Comtesse, but have always been extremely impressed with the vintages I have tasted.



*Gérard and his son, Thibaut Boulay, at our vertical tasting of Clos de Beaujeu in New York.*

### **2015 Sancerre “La Comtesse”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2015 Sancerre “La Comtesse” from Domaine Gérard Boulay is the most minerally in profile out of the blocks of all the estate's cru bottlings, with the elegance that this *terroir* had long been renowned for very much in evidence. The complex bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of lemon, green apple, chalky minerality, a hint of oyster shell, gentle botanicals and a

pungent topnote of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very much defined by its minerality, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids, excellent focus and grip and a very long, very youthful and gently peppery finish. This is one of the most impressively reserved examples of the 2015 vintage in Sancerre that I have tasted, which augurs very well indeed for its future evolution in bottle. First class juice! 2019-2035. **94.**

### ***Gérard Boulay's Sancerre "Clos de Beaujeu"***

Thanks to the proprietorship of the Cathedral of Saint Étienne in Bourges of the Clos de Beaujeu in the Middle Ages, and for many centuries following, this is probably one of the most well-known and historically important vineyards on the great Kimmeridgian ridge above Chavignol. However, today, I am only familiar with the Clos de Beaujeu bottling produced by the Boulay family and the Culs de Beaujeu cuvée produced by François Cotat, and if other domaines produce a single vineyard wine from this great *terroir*, I have yet to taste it. As I mentioned above, this vineyard has an exposition to the northwest, which makes it one of the cooler microclimates on this great ridge, producing wines that are generally more tightly-knit out of the blocks than those found in the Monts Damnés or in the La Côte d'Amigny. This is a very steep vineyard, with a sixty percent slope and it is much smaller than Monts Damnés, which may account for why one seldom sees other producers' examples of this wine bottled on its own. The Boulay family has owned their 1.3 hectares in the heart of this vineyard for several generations now, which is why Gérard Boulay selected this bottling for our vertical tasting in New York, as his father and grandfather were bottling this wine on its own for themselves and their private clients when the vast majority of their production was still going to *négociants*. The wines here tend to be beautifully structured and built for the long haul, with taut green fruit tones when young, chalky minerality and grassy tones that quickly give way to the more botanical exotica one finds in other crus from Chavignol with extended bottle age. The Boulay Clos de Beaujeu develops notes of beeswax, petrol and candied citrus peel with extended bottle age, while always retaining simply beautiful fruit tones at the core of its profile. As the notes below on vintages like 1995, 1989, 1985 and 1959 will attest, the Clos de Beaujeu from the Boulay family is one of the longest-lived wines in all of Chavignol, and one of its greatest expressions of vinosity.

### **2015 Sancerre "Clos de Beaujeu"- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2015 Clos de Beaujeu is an excellent example of this riper vintage, as the cooler exposition of this *terroir* has given the wine a lovely spine of acidity to frame the lovely fruit. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex mix of gooseberry, lime blossoms, chalky minerality, a hint of petrol and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with fine focus and grip, a lovely core and really good acidity for a 2015 perking up the long and zesty finish. Fine juice. 2017-2035. **93.**

### **2014 Sancerre "Clos de Beaujeu"- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

In contrast to the riper 2015, the 2014 Boulay Clos de Beaujeu is utterly classic in profile, with a bit more reserve out of the blocks, but even greater potential for longevity. The youthful bouquet offers up a blend of pink grapefruit, chalky minerality, citrus peel, gentle grassiness and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and racy, with lovely mid-palate intensity, excellent focus and balance and harmonious tension tying the elements of fruit, grass and minerality together on the long, vibrant and very precise finish. This is approachable today, but it is still a very young wine and I would recommend letting it have a full decade in the cellar before really starting to drink it. 2017-2055. **94.**

### **2013 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2013 vintage in Sancerre is one of moderate ripeness and this has translated into a Clos de Beaujeu from Gérard Boulay that is quite tightly-knit and a touch leaner out of the blocks. The bouquet shows lovely mineral definition in its constellation of grapefruit, a touch of white pepper, limestone minerality, grassy overtones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and very much defined by its underlying minerality, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, snappy and still quite youthful finish. In contrast to the 2014, which is very tasty in its youth, this wine is pretty buttoned up today behind its structural elements and demands some bottle age. It should prove to be a real long-distance runner and should be outstanding once it has blossomed. 2021-2055+. **93.**

### **2012 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (served from magnum)**

The Boulay family’s 2012 Clos de Beaujeu is a very pretty wine that has now blossomed nicely into its secondary stage of development, wafting from the glass in a lovely mix of lime, tangerine, chalky soil tones, fresh-cut grass and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite broad on the attack, with lovely complexity, zesty acids and impressive length and grip on the wide open and bouncy finish. My only quibble with this lovely example of Clos de Beaujeu is that it does not have quite the same concentration in the mid-palate as the very top vintages of this bottling, which suggests it will be one of the shorter-lived years of Clos de Beaujeu. However, for drinking over the next fifteen or so years, it will provide plenty of enjoyment. 2017-2035. **91+.**

### **2011 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2011 vintage in Sancerre was a bit challenging and the Clos de Beaujeu from Domaine Boulay shows some of the more moderate ripeness of this growing season. The bouquet is still fairly youthful, offering up scents of green apple, grapefruit, petrol, chalky minerality and wet grass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still plenty tight today, with a respectable core, excellent cut and grip and a long, focused and slightly green finish. Vintages like 2011 sometimes provide some of the best wines over the very long haul, so this could blossom down the road into something very tasty, but at the present time, it is a small step behind many of the other recent vintages of Clos de Beaujeu. 2020-2045+. **89.**

### **2010 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

I very much like the 2010 Clos de Beaujeu from Gérard Boulay, which has reached a really lovely moment in its evolution at age seven. The bouquet shows a lovely synthesis of ripe fruit and almost crystalline minerality, wafting from the glass in a fine combination of candied lime, tangerine, chalky minerality, emerging botanical notes, the first vestiges of beeswax and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with fine soil delineation, impeccable balance and grip and a long, zesty and classic finish. The wine remains a bit more primary on the palate than it is on the nose today, auguring very, very well for its continued positive evolution! Fine, fine juice. 20170-2050. **93+.**

### **2009 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (served from magnum)**

2009 is a riper year in Sancerre and not surprisingly, this is a bit less interesting to my palate than some of the racier vintages like 2008 and 2007. The complex bouquet is a bit deeper-pitched as a result of the heat of summer, delivering a blend of grapefruit, tart orange, damp grass, chalky, incipient notes of beeswax and musky floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and quite grassy in personality for this *terroir*, with a fine core, sound framing acids and good focus and balance on the long and wide open finish. This



does not have the same cut and grip as more classic years, but it is still a tasty bottle for relatively near-term drinking. 2017-2030+. **90.**

**2008 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (served from magnum)**

The 2008 vintage was a bit lean out of the blocks, but the Boulay Clos de Beaujeu is really starting to blossom nicely and is likely to be a long-lived and outstanding vintage of this fine bottling. The bouquet is blossoming nicely, wafting from the glass today in a complex blend of tart orange, gentle botanicals, chalky minerality, white flowers and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and still nicely tensile in personality, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a very long, soil-driven and vibrant finish. This is now drinking with plenty of style, but has decades of life still ahead of it and there is no rush to start drinking it now! 2017-2040. **92+.**

**2007 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (served from magnum)**

As time has gone on, the 2007 vintage has proven itself to be one of the great years in recent times in Sancerre and the '07 Clos de Beaujeu is drinking today with all of the depth, complexity and style of a great vintage. The bouquet is pure, refined and utterly complete, jumping from the glass in a blaze of lime, sweet grapefruit, chalky minerality, spring flowers, incipient notes of beeswax, orange peel and the first hints of the botanicals that will come in the fullness of time. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a fine core of fruit, superb soil inflection, racy acids and outstanding cut and grip on the very long, balanced and classic finish. 2017-2050. **94.**

**2006 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (served from magnum)**

2006 was a warm year in Sancerre and the Boulay Clos de Beaujeu reflects this now in its softer structural personality, but the wine has aged quite gracefully and is really very enjoyable to drink at its present peak. The nose is a fine and complex blend of lemon, beeswax, grassy undertow, still hints of its youthful white pepper and gentle floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad on the attack, with a good core, plenty of brightness and detail and a long, wide open and complex finish. By the long distance runner standards of this bottling, this vintage is decidedly short-lived, but the wine remains at its apogee today and offers up no shortage of enjoyment for near-term drinking. 2017-2025. **90.**

**2004 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2004 Clos de Beaujeu from Monsieur Boulay is an utterly classic, exceptional vintage for this cuvée and at age thirteen, it is just hitting its stride of peak maturity. The vibrant bouquet delivers a superb constellation of lime, green apple, fresh-mown grass, loads of citrus zest, chalky minerality and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and showing off real Chablis-like minerality in its wet stone signature. The core is rock solid, the wine has impeccable focus and balance and is very, very long and energetic on the laser-like finish. Great juice. 2017-2045. **94.**

**2003 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2003 Clos de Beaujeu is as exotic in personality as one would expect from this scorching summer, as the wine fully reached fifteen percent octane this year, but it is also complex and loaded with personality and far more interesting at age fourteen than I ever would have imagined. The bouquet is a mix of candied orange, quince, damp grass, a hint of honey, gentle smokiness and a nice touch of lime blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and soft, with a broad attack, solid depth at the core and a long, idiosyncratic, but complex finish. While the acids here are low, the wine has retained a nice veneer of vibrancy

that makes it quite tasty to drink and might be quite interesting paired with roasted fowl. 2017-2025. **88.**

**2002 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2002 vintage is one of my favorite in recent memory in Sancerre and the Boulay Clos de Beaujeu from this year is outstanding. The bouquet is pure, complex, vibrant and at its apogee, offering up scents of orange, lime, gentle grassiness, wet stone minerality, a touch of petrol and a topnote of candied citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still rock solid at the core, with bright, zesty acids, laser-like focus and a very, very long, pure and complex finish. Fifteen years of age and now at its zenith, the 2002 Clos de Beaujeu will continue to drink with great beauty for decades to come. 2017-2040. **94.**

**2001 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2001 Clos de Beaujeu is the only vintage in recent memory at Domaine Boulay to go through malolactic fermentation and the wine is rather unique in personality as a result. The bouquet is quite deep-pitched for this cuvée, delivering an aromatic combination of yellow fruit, orange peel, damp grass, chalky soil tones and white pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite atypical in profile, but with a good core, fine cut and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. This still has plenty of life in it, but despite its rarity, it is not my favorite interpretation of this great *terroir*. 2017-2035+. **88.**



### **2000 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2000 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu” from Domaine Gérard Boulay is at its apogee and is quite classic in personality on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of green apple, lime, fresh-cut grass, orange peel, the first vestiges of honeycomb, dried flowers and a lovely base of wet stone minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and at its zenith, with lovely generosity on the attack, an impressive core, bright framing acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and dancing finish. Fine juice. 2017-2030. **92.**

### **1999 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 1999 vintage of Clos de Beaujeu from the Boulays is also at its peak and is a half-step ahead of the lovely 2000 version. The wine delivers a fine aromatic constellation of tangerine, candied lime peel, complex, Chartreuse-like botanicals, wet stone minerality, gentle smokiness and still a nice touch of fresh-cut grassiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully transparent in personality, with fine mid-palate depth, zesty acids and impeccable focus and grip on the long and poised finish. This is outstanding wine with miles to go before it sleeps. 2017-2040. **93.**

### **1998 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 1998 Clos de Beaujeu is also excellent, and though I have no doubt that it was slightly eclipsed by the 1999 in its youth, today it is even slightly superior to my palate! The bouquet is a lovely blend of green fruit, complex botanicals, wet stones, orange peel, discreet notes of beeswax and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and *à point*, with a fine core of fruit, excellent complexity and grip, bright acids and superb balance on the very long, focused and classy finish. This is a bit more minerally and botanical in personality than the equally lovely 1999 version, with even greater length and backend energy. Superb juice! 2017-2040. **93+.**

### **1997 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 1997 Clos de Beaujeu from Gérard Boulay is another lovely bottle in its prime, with a slightly more youthful profile than either the 1999 or 1998 versions. The bouquet is bright, complex and refined, offering up scents of yellow fruit, tart orange, beeswax, citrus peel, chalky soil tones, fresh-cut grass and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still impressively racy in personality, with a lovely core, outstanding soil inflection, excellent focus and grip and a very long, minerally finish. Served alongside of the 1999 and 1998, one can sense that the 1997 did not share the perfectly ripe fruit of the two subsequent vintages, but at the same time, this is a really lovely expression of the underlying *terroir* of the Clos de Beaujeu and is an outstanding vintage in its own right. 2017-2040. **92.**

### **1996 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (served from magnum)**

The 1996 vintage of Clos de Beaujeu was touched by a bit of botrytis reported Monsieur Boulay, and this gives the wine a quite tropical aromatic profile and also resulted in the fermentation stopping with a fair bit of residual sugar (which is also quite out of character here). The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pineapple, tangerine, freshly-mowed grass, chalky soil tones and honey. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and notably sweet on the backend, with good acidity, fine focus and grip and still nicely balanced, without any of the backend bitterness that botrytis will often bring to these wines with extended bottle age. This is utterly unique and Madame Boulay likes to serve this wine these days with foie gras at the holidays. 2017-2050. **90.**

### **1995 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

I love the point of evolution the 1995 Clos de Beaujeu has reached, as at age twenty-two the wine is completely mature, but still vibrant, pure and zesty. The utterly classic bouquet delivers a fine constellation of lime zest, tangerine, wet stone minerality, Chartreuse-like botanicals, gentle smokiness and a topnote of candied citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and laser-like in its precision, with outstanding mid-palate depth, bright acids and outstanding balance and grip on the very, very long, vibrant and complex finish. I suspect that several of the younger vintages in this tasting will eventually catch the 1995, but for the present time, this sits at the top of the pyramid of Boulay Clos de Beaujeu! 2017-2035+. **95.**

### **1989 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

When I think back to how beautiful the 1989 vintage of Sancerre was out of the blocks, I am not surprised at the superb quality of the Boulay Clos de Beaujeu today and only wish I had known then what I know now, as I would probably still have at least some bottles of Cotat and Vatan 1989s in my cellar, as I sold both of these producers' wines at the time and drank plenty of them in my formative years. Monsieur Boulay's wines I was not familiar with back in the day, but it was great pleasure to be introduced to his '89 Clos de Beaujeu at our vertical, as the wine is drinking splendidly. The bouquet is a fine combination of lime, green apple, tangerine, complex minerality, smoky overtones, orange peel, gentle grassy notes and gentle petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still absolutely rock solid at the core, with great focus and cut, laser-like focus and a very, very long and intensely flavored finish. This is a more powerful, but less elegant version of Clos de Beaujeu than the equally stunning 1995. 2017-2050. **94.**

### **1985 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 1985 Clos de Beaujeu is the first vintage produced by Gérard Boulay “flying solo” at the head of the domaine and the wine is fully mature and drinking with style and grace. The bouquet wafts from the glass, offering up scents of lime, tangerine, an exotic touch of coffee, chalky minerality, citrus peel and a discreet topnote of botanicals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still has lovely depth at the core, with a fine synthesis of tertiary complexity and vibrant acids. The finish is very, very long, perfectly balanced and refined, with plenty of energy and verve. Lovely juice. 2017-2030. **92.**

### **1959 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

This was the last bottle of 1959 Clos de Beaujeu in the Boulay family cellars made by Louis Boulay and it was extremely generous of the family to share it at our vertical tasting. The color of the wine is even lighter than the 1985, with its green-golden hue in the glass promising vinous fireworks. The bouquet is everything one could dare to hope for, soaring from the glass in a deep and complex blend of candied lemon and lime, tangerine, crystalline minerality, a gentle touch of beeswax, a distinct note of lavender and lovely smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still at its peak, with a stunning core, brilliant complexity and haunting length and grip on the stellar finish. There are still lovely framing acids here to keep the wine vibrant and pure, and as amazing as it may seem, this wine at nearly sixty years of age still has years and years of life in it! This bottle is the one in the photograph as the start of this article. An utterly brilliant wine that fully underscores just how long-lived the Clos de Beaujeu can be when vinified classically! 2017-2035+. **96.**



### ***Gérard Boulay's Sancerre Rosé***

While the Boulay family makes a Sancerre Rouge bottling in very small quantity, I have never had the pleasure to taste it. The domaine does not own a lot of pinot noir vines, as Chavignol has long been known for the superb quality of its white wines, but the Boulays' parcels of pinot noir are in the steep hillside vineyards in the village and relatively old vines, averaging the same thirty-five to forty year range as many of their sauvignon blanc plantings. The pinot noir is all planted on the north side of the giant hillside that houses Monts Damnés and the Clos de Beaujeu, with a northerly-facing exposition that provides a far cooler microclimate than the south-facing side of the slope. There are never any set guidelines about which plots of pinot noir will be earmarked for the Boulay Sancerre Rouge and which for their superb Sancerre Rosé, as this is something that Gérard will decide around harvest time each year. The Boulay Sancerre Rosé is made from a gentle pressing, with the wine then fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks prior to bottling after five months of *elevage*. There is never a lot of this wine, as only two hundred cases are produced in any given vintage. As the notes below will attest, it ages very gracefully indeed, but I do not get the same sense of its developing more complexity with bottle age in the manner of François Cotat's Rosé for example, and the difference here may be that Monsieur Cotat ferments and does the *elevage* for his Rosé in an ancient cask, whereas Monsieur Boulay ferments and raises his in tank. But that said, this is still a very, very pretty and stylish example of Sancerre Rosé. Perhaps it would be interesting in the



future for Monsieur Boulay to try making this wine in *foudre* as François Cotat does (and his father and uncle before him did as well) and see if he likes the results?

#### **2015 Sancerre Rosé- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2015 Sancerre Rosé from Gérard Boulay is a young and very refined example in the making, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of melon, strawberries, chalky minerality and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and zesty, with a primary personality, fine focus and grip and a long, youthful finish. This is probably a year or two away from starting to drink with real generosity and should age quite nicely over the mid-term, but I would be surprised if the warm summer of 2015 will have produced a long-lived example of this bottling. 2018-2025+. **88+**.

#### **2014 Sancerre Rosé- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2014 Sancerre Rosé from Monsieur Boulay is notably paler in color than the 2015 version and displays more *nervosité* and mineral personality out of the blocks than the latter year. The bouquet is still quite youthful in its mélange of tangerine, chalky soil tones, orange peel and a distinctively smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite nicely defined by its underlying minerality, with good cut and grip and a long, racy and still primary finish. This is approachable today, but I would still like to see it with a bit more bottle age. 2017-2030. **89+**.

#### **2013 Sancerre Rosé- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2013 vintage has produced one of my favorite recent Boulay Rosés and the wine is drinking very nicely at age four. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of white cherries, smoke, chalky soil tones and orange peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and precise, with a good core, zesty acids, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and classy finish that closes with a distinct note of cherry skin. Good juice. 2017-2030. **91**.

#### **2012 Sancerre Rosé- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2012 Boulay Sancerre Rosé is a very pretty wine, but without the *nervosité* and complexity found in the 2013 today. The nose is a stylish mix of melon, strawberry, chalk, dried flowers and a touch of orange peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and still fairly primary in personality, with respectable depth in the mid-palate (but not the core of the wines preceding it) and a long and vibrant finish. Very tasty, but not quite as serious a vintage as a few of these others in the lineup. 2017-2025. **88+**.

#### **2011 Sancerre Rosé- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2011 Rosé from Gérard Boulay is at its apogee and drinking very nicely indeed today. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a bright blend of dried cherries, orange peel, chalky minerality, dried flowers and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and wide open and hitting on all cylinders, with still lovely acidity, fine focus and grip and a long, bouncy finish. Good juice. 2017-2025. **90**.

#### **2009 Sancerre Rosé- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

The 2009 vintage was even riper than 2010, but interestingly, the Rosé from Domaine Boulay is far younger today than the 2010 version and this wine looks poised to be a real long-distance runner for this cuvée. The bouquet offers up notes of cherries, blood orange, gentle smokiness, chalky soil and a nice touch of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and succulent, with an impressive core, good soil signature and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. 2017-2030. **89**.

**2008 Sancerre Rosé- Domaine Gérard Boulay**

Like the 2008 Clos de Beaujeu, the 2008 Sancerre Rosé from Gérard Boulay is outstanding and is right in the heart of its plateau today. The bouquet offers up a bright and classy nose of blood orange, white cherries, orange, gentle spice tones, chalky soil and citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with zesty acids, outstanding focus and grip, lovely balance and a very long, very precise finish. This is very impressive juice that may yet gain a bit more complexity with further bottle age! 2017-2030. **91+**.

## AN EVENING OF THE OUTSTANDING 2004 BAROLI WITH TOM HYLAND



At the start of October I joined thirty-five other lovers of Piemonte wines for an evening at La Pizza Fresca in New York to taste through a selection of 2004 Baroli and hear Tom Hyland speak about the wines and the vintage. I had met Tom for the first time only last spring during my visit to Campania and had immediately liked him for his honest, no nonsense approach to Italian wines and food, about which he knows more than virtually anyone here in the US. Tom is based in Chicago, so his visits to New York are not all that common and I attended the dinner as much to see Tom again as to taste through the lineup of 2004 Baroli that was assembled for the evening, as our roster included quite a few of the more modern-styled wines than I would normally desire to taste in one sitting. However, as I do not taste wines from this camp in Piemonte with any frequency (almost never might be more accurate!), it was actually useful to work through a handful of examples of modernists in a top flight vintage such as 2004 and see how the wines were progressing with a dozen years out from the vintage. Sadly, the modern wines ranged from mediocre to piss poor and were hardly representative of the greatness inherent in Barolo- particularly in a top flight vintage such as '04- but there were enough classics also sprinkled into our tasting to make the evening well worth the price of admission. As the lineup was assembled by the restaurant from their deep cellars, Tom had no input into what was tasted and was quite the diplomat in finding something positive to say about each wine, no matter how

desultory the wine was showing in the glass, but it was quite clear that his heart was with the traditionalists on this evening.

One of Tom's comments about the modernists on this evening really hit home, as it was quite true of the original inspiration for the move to small, French *barriques* for the aging of Barolo and Barbaresco in the mid-1980s, and which should really be assessed in the context of how our modernist wines showed on this particular evening. Tom noted that "the movement towards smaller French oak barrels, shorter macerations and earlier bottling were all part of the modernist movement in Piemonte and were initially inspired by a desire to give the wines more fruitiness and tame the firm tannic structure of young Barolo, so that the wines could be approachable without having to wait twenty or more years for the wines to open up after cellaring." This is a pretty concise synopsis of the primary motivations behind the modernists in Piemonte and it was interesting to note that one of the consistent elements of the modern '04s we tasted from estates such as La Spinetta, Roberto Voerzio and Paolo Scavino on this particular evening was just how little fruit actually remained in the wines at age twelve! Their sojourn in new oak was obviously done sloppily, with the wines drying out to a significant degree prior to bottling, and at age twelve, most of these were really short on fruit and in the process of withering in the bottle. This was in stark contrast to the classicists in the lineup- Marcarini, Massolino, Roberto Conterno and Giacosa- who were simply loaded with youthful fruit tones that were still relatively reined in behind their well-balanced structures, but were as evident as the sun behind a wisp of cloud. Additionally, one of the main tenets of the modernists in Barolo and Barbaresco has always been that nebbiolo's tannins are so obdurate that they must be managed carefully to keep the wine from being dominated by them, and yet to varying degrees, all of the modernists' wines were punctuated by uncovered, drying wood tannins on the finish from their sojourns in new *barriques* that were in the process of drying out the wines and eventually killing them. So based on the original aims of the modernists to project more fruit and rein in tannins, one has to observe that at least amongst the 2004s in our lineup on this October evening, the experiment has proven to be an abysmal failure.

Of course, none of this was a surprise to me, as I began my love affair with Barolo and Barbaresco back at the dawn of the modernist era in the early-1980s and cellared wines from both modernists and classicists in my formative days, as I simply did not know any better and believed the positive press that producers such as Clerico, Altare, Scavino and Sandrone received at that time. Most of these modernists continue to be treated with kid gloves by many of my esteemed colleagues as the years have rolled by, leading one to wonder if they even bothered to cellar any of these wines and follow their rather disappointing evolutions in bottle, but I at least learned my lesson with these early vintages and stopped wasting a percentage of my wine-buying budget on modernist estates in Piemonte by the end of the 1980s. In my experience, and I did indeed cellar a lot of different producers from the modern school from vintages such as 1985, 1988 and 1989, the wines simply did not deliver with bottle age *vis à vis* the classicists in my cellar from these formative years. Sometimes I lament that the money I spent at that time on modern Baroli and Barbaresci had not been devoted solely to the classically-styled estates, as I would dearly love to have more Giuseppe Mascarello or Marcarini in my cellar from those days, but it was an investment in education and I certainly learned a lot about how the modern school of Piemonte wines devolves with bottle age. But, now that I seldom come across open bottles from modernists, given my penchant to score them accurately, it was nice to once again have a

few poured at our tasting at La Pizza Fresca and remind me of just how bad some of those wines can be with bottle age. However, there was one really bright spot in the modernist camp at our 2004 Baroli dinner, and that was the 2004 Gaja Barolo “Sperrs”, which really was a paradigm of balance, elegance and sophisticated charm, and if I were ever going to fully give my heart to a wine from the modernist camp, this would be the type of wine that could sway me to stray from my deep traditionalist roots! It so towered over the other modern wines in its sense of breed and balance, not to mention its beautiful fruit component, despite being plenty defined by its new oak element, that it further underscored just how wrong-headed folks like Roberto Voerzio and others in the modernist camp were in the first decade of the new millennium (and probably still are today).

That said, the reason that I was at the tasting, beyond seeing Tom Hyland again and enjoying his discourse over the evening, was that some of my absolute favorite bottlings from the classical side of the ledger were also on display, and one cannot think of a more instructive comparison of the two camps in Piemonte in which to have participated. Wines such as the Marcarini “Brunate”, Giacomo Conterno “Cascina Francia” and Bruno Giacosa “Falletto di Serralunga” White Label were eloquent testimonies to both the great potential of the utterly classic 2004 vintage in Piemonte and the huge quality gap between classicists and modernists that continues to define the wines of the region. None of these old school wines was even remotely close to ready to drink, as a properly fine vintage in Piemonte such as 2004 should not expect to see any classically-made Baroli even approachable before they are at least twenty to twenty-five years of age, but the wines were so beautifully pure, deep and seamlessly structured that their ultimate greatness was self-evident and it is only a matter of time until they begin to truly blossom and offer up some superb drinking. I really enjoyed the inherent balance of these classical examples of 2004, as the tannins were ripe and very finely integrated into the base of fruit in the wines, with the underlying soil tones front and center and with sufficient bottle age, they will be cellar treasures. In terms of overall balance, perhaps the 2004s are a bit reminiscent of the 1978s at a similar stage in their evolution? Like many other regions in Europe in 2004, the crop size in Piemonte was large, due to the very short crop-load the year before in the torrid summer of 2003, as vines stored up unneeded energy reserves from ’03 and channeled them into forming an enormous number of bunches in ’04. However, in Piemonte, an absolutely pristine month of September allowed the crop to ripen to perfection and picking began in mid-October under ideal and unhurried conditions. The key to the beauty of 2004 lies in the month of September, as hot, sunny days were followed each evening by cool temperatures, with the wide diurnal swing of each day allowing for the wines to retain beautiful freshness, bright acids and really bring the underlying soil signatures to the fore in the finished wines.

This inherent beauty and balance of the classically-styled wines of the 2004 vintage was very much in evidence in the handful of wines that we tasted on this lovely October evening, and it is quite clear that 2004 is one of the very finest vintages of the last twenty years in the region. The wines are not as powerfully constructed as years such as 2001 or 1996, but they are more charming in their youth and more pure and soil-driven than the also very fine vintage of 1999. It may very well prove that the 2004s at their apogees will surpass all three of these outstanding vintages in Piemonte, or at least rank right up there with the best of these other three top years. However, the classicists of 2004 are nowhere near ready for earnest drinking yet and I would suggest that at least another decade is merited in the cellar to allow these beautiful wines to move



from their present stage of outstanding potential and emerge as wines of generosity, balance and suave accessibility. It should prove to be a very long-lived vintage, with at least fifty years of potential drinking in their primes, so there is really little point in opening bottles now if you have a good stash of 2004 classically-made Baroli in your cellar. If you have bought some of the modern wines from the vintage, I really do not know what advice to share, as to varying degrees, all of the modern wines we tasted were already past their best and shared some issue with overall balance and their collective futures seemed highly problematic. The very best of the group, Roberto Voerzio's "Brunate" was really quite pretty for the first fifteen to twenty minutes in the glass, with its very generous serving of new oak nicely carried by pure cherry fruit and lovely floral tones. However, with a bit of time in the glass, the wood tannins started to overwhelm the very pretty fruit in the wine and the finish dried out to the point of being unbalanced and overtly astringent. And this was the best of the lot!



*Author Tom Hyland with an empty bottle of the 2004 Falletto di Serralunga from Bruno Giacosa.*

The following wines, which represent a small, but nicely varied snapshot of the 2004 vintage in Barolo, were tasted on the evening of October 3<sup>rd</sup> of 2016 and I had intended to augment these notes with another broad tasting of the 2004s before publishing this article. However, as time keeps ticking by and my calendar has not yet found a spot for another round of 2004 Piemonte classicists, I decided to print this piece now and simply write a follow-up article on more 2004s when the time comes. As I mentioned in the introduction, the restaurant La Pizza

Fresca here in New York sponsored the tasting and culled the wines from their own very deep cellar, all of which were purchased upon release. The food for the evening was very good, with the pizza course offering the best and most authentic Neapolitan pizza that I have had outside of Campania, and I intend to be back here soon to savor more pizza and dip my beak in their very deep cellar though steering clear of the modernists that are sprinkled throughout their list! I should also mention that Tom Hyland was in New York promoting his new guide book to Piedmontese wines and food, which is a lovely general guide to the region and really a fine book. It is a small book that is designed to pack in your luggage for trips to the region, and consequently, cannot go into tremendous depth on any specific estate, but it is very well written and researched and comes highly recommended. Overall, it was a very enjoyable evening from the point of research (when it comes to the modernists, as there was not much actual joy in the glass for those wines!) and showed just how good the vintage is going to be when it comes to the classicists. The one real surprise for me was just how much I enjoyed the 2004 Gaja Barolo “Sperrs” bottling, which was fairly modern in personality, but so impeccably well-balanced and executed in this style that it really put the other modernists to shame. The new oak tannins here were expertly managed and there was absolutely no signs of backend astringency from uncovered wood tannins, which made it utterly unique amongst the 2004 modernists shown on this evening! It is still not a style that I find as personally attractive as the great old Gajas of yesteryear- particularly when compared to the more classically styled wines produced at Gaja in the late ‘70s and 1980s on which I cut my teeth and will never forget- but it was a suavely crafted and very successful wine in its more modern and luxuriant guise (as fine as any bottle of Lafite-Rothschild in its own way) and deserves to be highly praised for its seamless beauty in its own particular style.

I have listed the wines below in the order that the flights were served, so one can get a sense of how the evening unfolded. Happily, I had the good sense to hold onto some of my 2004 Marcarini Brunate through the first course of the dinner, so I had something to drink with the second course, as the three Scavino wines served in this flight were simply undrinkable. The last flight was, of course, the most beautiful of the evening, with the truly exceptional Gaja “Sperrs” joining the twin towers of Conterno “Cascina Francia” and Giacosa “Falletto” white label. It was not an in-depth revisit to the fine 2004 vintage (particularly with so many sad modernist wines served!), but it is a good snapshot into one of the most promising vintages of the new millennium in Piemonte and really has me looking forward to finding the time to organize a far broader lineup of traditionalists from the vintage!

### ***First Flight***

#### **2004 Barolo- Massolino**

Massolino is based in the village of Serralunga d’Alba and farms twenty-two hectares of vines in this village (with an additional 1.3 hectare parcel in the neighboring village of Castiglione Falletto). Their wines are made with a fairly short maceration period of fifteen days, but aged exclusively in older *botti*, with their Barolo *Normale* cuvée spending two and a half years in these large cask prior to bottling. This wine showed very well at our tasting, delivering a fine bouquet of cherries, grilled venison, camphor, road tar, forest floor and a topnote of oregano. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fairly complex and starting to get closer to blossoming, with a good core, fine focus and balance and a long, moderately chewy finish. This is a very well

made basic bottling and should be quite tasty with a few more years of bottle age. 2020-2050+. **90+.**

#### **2004 Barolo “Campè”- La Spinetta**

The 2004 Barolo “Campè” from La Spinetta is a poster child for everything wrong with modern-styled Barolo. The wine’s initial alcoholic fermentation was done in roto-fermenters over the course of seven to eight days, then racked into one hundred percent new *barriques* for its malolactic fermentation and initial aging period of two years. The wine finished its aging in stainless steel tanks for nine months prior to bottling. Today, the wine is effectively dead, offering up an anonymously black fruity bouquet that struggles to be heard under the onslaught of new, smoky oak. Faint scents of black cherries, hung game and balsamic vinegar poke through under the heavy cloud of toasted wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and already obviously lacking in vitality, with density at the core, dry-edged (and progressively more astringent as the wine sees more air), with plenty of uncovered oak tannins on the finish and zero complexity or bounce. The overall effect is of a charred, gritty and leaden wine of no redeeming merits. It will probably continue on this sodden course for another couple of decades, but it is already patently unpleasant to drink and I can only imagine it getting worse with more bottle age. 2016-2035? **78.**

#### **2004 Barolo “Brunate”- Roberto Voerzio**

Roberto Voerzio’s 2004 Brunate really seemed like a good example of the modern camp for its brief twenty minutes of positive evolution in the glass, after which the wood tannins became more pronounced and pushed the wine to the point of imbalance. While it was still showing well, there was plenty of fruit to augment the new oak tones, with notes of black cherries, roasted game, road tar, dried herbs competing favorably with the vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and stylish on the attack, with a good core, sound focus and a long, chewy finish. I was really quite pleasantly surprised by this wine when first poured, but even at its best, there were some uncovered wood tannins poking out on the backend. However, with time in the glass, the wood tannins continued to build and dry the finish, the bouquet became far more one-dimensional with spicy wood dominating, and the wine simply tumbled out of balance. I do not think I have ever recommended not giving a young Barolo air, but this is a wine that I would pop, decant and immediately drink up, as it gives its highest level of pleasure before it has had a chance to aerate and turn astringent. This type of evolution in the glass does not give one any real hope for future evolution with bottle age, as the wood will probably just continue to become more domineering as the years go by. It is too bad, for though there was very little soil signature of Brunate when first opened, the wine was surprisingly tasty for that brief moment! Over the first twenty minutes, this was a solid **88** point wine, but descended from there as the wood got the upper hand in the nose and on the finish with extended aeration. 2016-2030+? **84.**

#### **2004 Barolo “Brunate- Marcarini**

This was my first look at Marcarini’s 2004 Brunate and the wine is an absolute classic in the making. The bouquet is deep, pure and still fairly primary, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, roses, a superb base of soil, gentle tariness and a nice topnote of anise. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with a lovely sense of sappiness in reserve at the core, fine-grained, ripe tannins, impeccable focus and grip and a very long, seamless and still quite youthful finish. This is a great bottle in the making and all that is needed is further bottle age to allow it to blossom properly! What a relief to have it in an evening that featured too many tragic modernists. 2025-2075. **94.**

## ***Second Flight***

### **2004 Barolo “Bricco Ambrogio”- Paolo Scavino**

I have had the pleasure to meet the Scavino sisters at a tasting here in New York a few years ago and who have taken over the running of their family estate. They are lovely ladies who often mention how they intend to make the wines here in a more classical style in the future. Perhaps they have already begun this process, but it was clearly not part of the program at the estate back in 2004, and these are three pretty sad wines. The '04 Bricco Ambrogio is beautifully spit-polished on the nose, offering up scents of anonymous black fruit, spicy new oak and tar. The focus and precision of the bouquet are impressive, but there is nothing here today that can stand up to the onslaught of overdone new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tarry and completely overwhelmed by its wood component, with the overtly dry and astringent backend of a Barolo that is already dead and gone. I could not imagine a time where this would be enjoyable to drink. ??? 60.

### **2004 Barolo “Bricco del Fiasc”- Paolo Scavino**

The 2004 Bric del Fiasc from Paolo Scavino is notably better balanced than their Bricco Ambrogio, but this is not to be confused with a good wine. The bouquet still shows some black cherry personality to the fruit component, along with notes of balsamic vineyard, road tar and the heavy hand of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite tarry in personality, with pretty good length on the drying, astringent finish that closes with notes of uncovered wood tannins and creosote. This wine is already well in its way to astringency, but it is not quite dead yet, and probably will be most enjoyable if drunk over the next several years. That said, I certainly did not enjoy drinking on this day! 2016-2023+? 72.

### **2004 Barolo “Cannubi”- Paolo Scavino**

The beauty of the Cannubi vineyard cannot be totally tarnished, even when the winemaking regimen has no interest in safeguarding its unique character! This is the best of the 2004 Scavino wines, with the Cannubi sappiness still somewhat evident in its bouquet of black cherries, a touch of licorice, road tar and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and only slightly dry-edged today, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip, very modest complexity (particularly for Cannubi!) and a long, chewy finish. This is the most drinkable Scavino 2004 today, but in a chunky, ham-fisted way. The wood tannins on the backend are not covered with fruit, so this wine will probably get progressively less interesting as the years go by. However, one can still sense here that this vineyard gave the Scavino family some stunning fruit to work with in 2004, but the opportunity was squandered under the foolhardy tenets of modern Barolo winemaking. 2020-2040? 79.

## ***Third Flight***

### **2004 Barolo “Sperrs”- Gaja**

Following on the heels of the three car accident that was the 2004 range of Scavinos, the 2004 Gaja Sperrs was really a breath of fresh air, as this is a modern wine that is impeccably balanced and well done, so that there is plenty to enjoy on both the nose and palate. There is a generous serving of smoky, nutty new oak in the bouquet, but it is nicely tempered by beautiful notes of black cherries, camphor, licorice, woodsmoke and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and certainly new oaky in personality, but with a sappy core, fine focus and grip, lovely balance and a very long, chewy and nicely integrated finish. Unlike most examples of modern Barolo that I taste these days, in the 2004 Gaja Sperrs the wood here is really well done and will not pose any imminent threat to the overall sense of

harmony of the wine over the long haul. A very lovely bottle that Tom Hyland noted included fifteen percent Barbera in the blend in 2004 (so perhaps it is not allowed to formally be called Barolo, but I still list the wine as such, being inherently conservative at heart). This is still a few years away from fully blossoming, but it will come forward far sooner than any of the old school producers' wines in this superb vintage. 2020-2050+. **93.**

**2004 Barolo "Cascina Francia"- Giacomo Conterno**

The Conterno family's 2004 Cascina Francia is a beautiful young wine in the making. The bouquet is pure, youthful and classically styled, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of cherries, blood orange, camphor, gamebird, a superb base of soil, woodsmoke and lovely spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, laser-like and tangy, with a sappy core of red fruit, stunning transparency, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the tangy and still very, very primary finish. This is a puppy and will need close to another decade in the cellar before it starts to stir, but it is going to be an outstanding example of this superb vintage. 2025-2075. **94.**

**2004 Barolo "Falletto di Serralunga"- Bruno Giacosa**

The 2004 White Label bottling of Falletto di Serralunga from Bruno Giacosa is a stellar wine in the making. The bouquet is deep, pure and beautifully detailed, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, gamebird, road tar, mustard seed, a very complex base of soil tones, anise and a dollop of fresh oregano in the upper register. With air, the cherry notes become smoky in their personality, which always seems to me to be a telltale aromatic element in an adolescent Giacosa wine. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and flawlessly balanced, with a sappy core of fruit, a very soil-driven personality, ripe tannins and lovely, vibrant acidity adding lift and precision on the very, very long, youthful finish. This is an outstanding wine in the making and further evidence that the distance between the White Labels and the Riservas at this estate are nowhere near as wide as the market suggests! 2025-2075. **95.**

## CLOS ROUGEARD SAUMUR-CHAMPIGNY'S FIRST GROWTH



The Foucault family has farmed their ten-plus hectares of vineyards in Saumur-Champigny for eight generations, with the brothers Bernard “Nadi” and Jean-Pierre “Charly” Foucault sharing duties as heads of the family estate from their first vintage in 1969 until Charly Foucault’s passing at the end of 2015. The domaine’s cellars are based in the small village of Chacé, just south of the lovely city of Saumur. During their time together at the helm of Clos Rougeard, Charly Foucault oversaw the winemaking of the estate, while younger brother Nadi primarily held responsibility for the administrative side of things at the domaine, with both brothers of course tending the vineyards. The Foucault family can trace its wine-producing heritage all the way back to 1664 in Saumur, with Charly and Nadi’s grandfather establishing the domaine name of Clos Rougeard in the very first years of the twentieth century, but uncertainty has surrounded the future of the estate since the sudden passing of Charly Foucault in December of 2015. The problem of succession arises from Nadi and his wife Anne (daughter of Sancerre icon Edmond Vatan) not having any children of their own, and Nadi not getting along particularly well with his nephew, Antoine Foucault. Charly Foucault’s wife Françoise and her son would like to purchase Nadi’s half of Clos Rougeard and maintain the family legacy in Chacé, but it is not at all clear that their offer will be deemed acceptable to Nadi and it may well be that the family tension will lead to the end of the Foucault family’s ownership of Clos



Rougeard. The domaine has been listed as for sale at the *Mairie* in Chacé now for several weeks (French law requires a posting of its availability for two months at the Mayor's office, so that all those interested can be made aware) and it seems likely that the sale will be consummated shortly after this article is completed.

Early this year, rumors surfaced that Clos Rougeard had indeed been sold to telecom mogul Martin Bouygues, who is owner of Château Montrose in Ste. Estèphe. These rumors ultimately appeared to be premature, as there has been no confirmation from either party over several months since the flurry of reports in January, but they underscore that the future of this great Saumur estate in the wake of Charly Foucault's death is not yet charted. Presently, the domaine continues to be headed by Nadi Foucault, while Antoine Foucault continues to run his own Saumur estate, Domaine du Collier, as he has for several years now. Tensions have been high between Nadi and his nephew Antoine for quite some time (Antoine founded Domaine du Collier all the way back in 1999), so it may well be the that Nadi will ultimately prefer to sell the domaine and each side of the family go their separate ways. This would be a great loss for the wine-loving world, as the great reputation that Clos Rougeard currently enjoys is based unequivocally on the hard work and unwavering commitment to quality that several generations of Foucaults have expended at the head of Clos Rougeard and it would be a shame to have this change at the apogee of the domaine's success, due primarily to a long-running family quarrel. At least Antoine Foucault returned part-time to Clos Rougeard in 2016 to vinify the vintage here (with great success it has been reported), which may be a hopeful sign for those of us who would love to see the Foucault family's legacy continue on with future generations, rather than seeing the domaine sold to outsiders and the uncertain future that this would entail. For, the wines of Clos Rougeard today rest at the very pinnacle of quality in the constellation of Saumur-Champigny and their lofty reputation is very much deserved and firmly based on the stunning quality of their wines.

The Foucault brothers' tenure at the head of Clos Rougeard had been a golden era for the estate, as during their careers, the wines of the property went from the best-kept secrets in the central Loire to the most famous and coveted red wines in the entire region and they are now celebrated across the wine world and are mostly allocated to the wine lists of Michelin-starred restaurants within France. Outside of the finest culinary destinations of France and the deep cellars of long-time private clients of the domaine, the wines of Clos Rougeard are relatively hard to come by in the marketplace these days, with attendant price tags that reflect their relative scarcity. In many ways, the Foucault family has been decades ahead of their contemporaries in the region, anticipating and helping to create the great rise up in quality of the wines of Saumur in the last several decades, while at the same time ignoring fashionable trends that came and went with indifferent results. Nadi Foucault has liked to be quoted as saying "the only revolution at Clos Rougeard is that we have not changed anything!" Since the late '60s, the vineyards at Clos Rougeard have been farmed organically (neither the Foucault brothers' father or grandfather ever used chemical products in the vines here), with the yields always kept low and the wines made naturally in the cellars, with indigenous yeasts and bottled only after a long, leisurely *elevage* that ensures a very graceful evolution for the bottled wines. However, this was nothing new for the domaine, as this was simply how Nadi and Charly's father and grandfather before them had tended the vines and made the wines during their days at the head of the estate. Today, these practices are hardly revelatory, but in the 1970s they were absolutely extraordinary.

However, as the quality renaissance arrived here in the central Loire at the end of the 1980s and on into the 1990s, Clos Rougeard was an inspiration for an entire generation of young *vignerons* who sought to take Saumur-Champigny up to a higher level of quality than had been the case previously.

The trend in Saumur-Champigny and Chinon in the 1970s and early 1980s had been to adopt a more fruit-forward, Beaujolais-styled wine that could be drunk young in bistros and restaurants throughout the region and in Paris, but this style was never a temptation for the Foucault brothers, and to many of their neighbors, their traditionally-styled and seriously structured wines seemed completely out of step with commercial realities in the appellation for the first decade or two of their tenure at the head of Clos Rougeard. But, Nadi and Charly Foucault had no interest in changing the style of their family domaine's wines for a momentary fashion trend, preferring to craft long-lived examples of Saumur-Champigny in the style of their father and grandfather before them and they remained content with their smaller and loyal client base during this period of Saumur *Nouveau*. Like many of the great wines of France, during these years, the Foucaults built their success on placements on the best wine lists in the region, which in turn would create a small and very loyal base of private clients. Over time, the stylistic pendulum swung back to more classical and structured wines from this beautiful region and Clos Rougeard was perfectly positioned to take advantage to a return to stylistic sanity for Saumur-Champigny and the reputation of the domaine began to grow exponentially in the latter half of the 1980s and throughout the decade of the 1990s. Today, Clos Rougeard is, by a wide margin, the most well-known and highly-regarded red wine producer in the Loire and the price of their wines in the open market now reflect this, though until the last couple of years, the wines were never particularly expensive out the cellar door and it was the middlemen in the market that realized most of the profits off the wines of Clos Rougeard.



Clos Rougeard has one of the longest histories of any domaine in the Loire valley, as the Foucault family can trace back their history of tending vines in Saumur-Champigny all the way back to 1664, and Charly and Nadi Foucault were the eighth generation in the family to farm vines in les Poyeux and le Bourg! (That is Nadi in the vineyard of le Bourg to the left). Remarkably, the family's vineyard legacy was able to pass down from father to son or daughter without being split up for all of these eight generations, which makes the current chill between Nadi Foucault and his nephew Antoine even a bit more sad, as this great stretch of family continuity seems extremely fragile at the present time and we may well be on the verge of seeing its demise. The domaine was one of the very first in Saumur-Champigny to start estate bottling and selling their wines in bottle to private clients in all of the Loire, as the Foucault

brothers' grandfather trademarked the domaine's name all the way back in 1904 and the family was already estate bottling at this time and had developed a private clientele for their bottled Saumurs- when virtually all of their neighbors were still selling their wines off in barrel. The very best restaurants in the Loire in the first half of the twentieth century were already loyal clients of Clos Rougeard, and through their presence on these wine lists at the time, the Foucault family was able to develop a good base of private customers as well for their wines, so that they were well positioned to ignore the fashionable trend to lighter, simpler quaffing wines in the 1970s and early 1980s. The family's traditional farming methods were also very well established prior to Nadi and Charly taking the reins of the domaine, so there was never any temptation to use chemical fertilizers and treatments in the vineyards and the vines here have been farmed organically for decades and decades.

Today, Clos Rougeard's lineup includes four distinct bottlings: three red wines that bear the Saumur-Champigny AOC and a Saumur Blanc bottling from the vineyard of Brézé. The three reds wines are their blended Saumur-Champigny "le Clos" (though the label does not include the le Clos designation), made from a dozen different parcels of vines scattered around the villages of Chacé, Varrains and Dampierre, as well as their two single vineyard reds from the vineyards of les Poyeux and le Bourg. The Foucault family vineyard patrimony is comprised principally of four and a half hectares of cabernet franc vines- in those dozen parcels- that constitute the grape sources for their le Clos bottling of Saumur-Champigny, three hectares of vines in the vineyard of les Poyeux, one hectare of old vines in the vineyard Le Bourg and one hectare of chenin blanc vines in their white wine vineyard of Brézé. There has also always been a bit of additional chenin blanc planted in a chalkier section of les Poyeux since time immemorial, from which the Foucaults produced a tiny amount of white wine for several generations prior to their starting to commercialize their Saumur Blanc "Brézé" in 1993. All of these vineyards are planted with old vines, with the exception of certain plots which were hit hard by the frost of 1991 and had to be replanted, so there are a few parcels in the four and a half hectares that now go into le Clos that were replanted in the wake of that extremely cold weather. But, with the majority of these vineyards still in the fifty to seventy year range that go into this bottling, the le Clos is hardly a "young vine cuvée"! Of the two single vineyard bottlings of Saumur-Champigny, Les Poyeux is less venerable in vine age than le Bourg, with the vines ranging from thirty-five years of age up to sixty years old, and the cabernet franc vines in le Bourg ranging from seventy-five to more than one hundred years-old.

In addition to the three red wine bottlings of Saumur-Champigny at Clos Rougeard being defined by their variations in soil, as the le Clos is made up from different parcels, with varying *terroirs*, and the les Poyeux and le Bourg are quite different in their respective soil compositions, they also can be differentiated by their oak treatment in the cellars, as each wine has its own regimen that has been in place for many decades. The approach to oak in the Foucaults' cellars is often one of the more controversial elements that has been cited as a demerit by commentators less enamored of the wines of Clos Rougeard, as it was never particularly rare to hear that some of the wines at Clos Rougeard were "over-oaked" by those looking to cast doubt on the growing reputation of the domaine's wines in the decade of the 1990s. For example, here is Jacqueline Friedrich writing about Clos Rougeard in her 1996 book, A Wine and Food Guide to the Loire: "The results are mostly magnificent, though some are over-oaked and a few have been ever-so-slightly volatile." Of course, this has never been my experience. The single vineyard Le Bourg

cuvée has been raised for many, many vintages now entirely in new oak, while the les Poyeux spends its own *elevage* in “one wine” barrels sourced in Bordeaux from First Growth estates and the le Clos is raised entirely in older casks that were previously used for one of the other two red wines. In my experience, only the le Bourg shows a fairly new oaky personality in its youth (though this is always judiciously well-done to my palate), with the one wine barrels used for les Poyeux only exerting a gentle touch of oak to the profile of the wine and of course, the le Clos, raised in all older casks, is not oaky in the least.

The Foucault brothers were always happy to defend their use of smaller casks for the *elevage* of their wines, as Nadi Foucault has been quoted as saying “that when we speak of tradition in Saumur, back when most wines were still sold off in cask, it was the smaller, 225 liter barrels that were used”, as the larger *foudres* that became popular when estate bottling first arrived here “were of course too large for transport in earlier times.” In fact, one of Charly’s and Nadi’s grandfathers was a barrel-maker with his cooperage in a neighboring village, sourcing his wood from the forest of Tronçais, so the Foucault family is quite familiar with the barrel practices that were in place in the region a hundred years ago and are also quite well-versed when it comes to selecting casks. The le Bourg bottling, for which Charly and Nadi Foucault have always used one hundred percent new casks, is still raised in barrels made by a local cooper near Saumur, and this wine is indeed fairly marked by its new oak when it is young, as the casks are usually medium-toasted and their influence shows quite a bit in the wines soon after bottling. However, with extended cellaring, the new wood integrates beautifully and it is hardly a worry for the long-term balance of the wine. For the other two red wines here, the le Clos and les Poyeux, the accusations of “too much new oak” are of course way off base, as neither wine sees any new wood whatsoever, though there is always a touch of vanillin oak in evidence in the les Poyeux bottling, as the one wine casks that are sourced from First Growths in Bordeaux to raise this wine still impart a bit of influence to the finished wine.

In the cellars, the practices at Clos Rougeard are beautifully traditional, with the grapes destemmed upon arrival in the cellars (of course everything has been hand-harvested) and fermented with indigenous yeasts in open-topped cement or stainless steel vats. The must generally spends three to four weeks fermenting, with daily punch-downs (often done by foot) for a thorough, but gentle extraction and settling prior to being racked into casks or tanks for malolactic fermentation. The wines then spend anywhere from twelve to thirty months for their *elevage* in barrels, and as discussed above, with the wood regimen long-established for each cuvée: only older casks for the le Clos, the Bordeaux-sourced one wine barrels for the les Poyeux and new wood for the le Bourg. The le Clos is always bottled after the shortest *elevage*, which is typically from a year to a year and a half after the vintage (determined by the structure of the year), whereas the les Poyeux and le Bourg will spend another six to twelve months in cask before bottling, again depending on the style of a given vintage. While there are no hard and fast rules at Clos Rougeard regarding where the malo takes place, this is most often in *cuve* and it is only in certain vintages that the Foucault brothers have felt that the wines would be better if the malolactic fermentation occurred in barrel. Years such as 1981, 1987, 1990 and 1992 are the exceptions where the malolactic fermentation for the reds has taken place in barrel. The wines will typically be racked three to four times during the course of their *elevage*. All of the red wines are bottled without filtration and only fined (with egg whites) if necessary, and then bottled with fairly low levels of sulfur. Once bottled, they are all destined for long lives (with the

le Clos bottling no less of a long-distance runner than either les Poyeux or le Bourg) and routinely need at least fifteen or twenty years in the cellar to reach their apogees. While I have never tasted *really* far back at Clos Rougeard, there are many, many reports that wines from the first half of the twentieth century continue to drink splendidly and it does not seem unlikely that recent vintages are easily destined to be seventy-five to hundred year wines. So there is emphatically no rush to drink up young bottles of Clos Rougeard!

As I mentioned above, the relative newcomer in the Clos Rougeard lineup is their Saumur Blanc bottling from their one hectare parcel of chenin blanc in Brézé, which was first produced in 1993. Down through the years, there was always a tiny quantity of white wine produced by the Foucault family, from a few rows of chenin vines in the chalkiest section of les Poyeux, but this was never commercially available and was reserved for family consumption and sharing with long-time clients of the domaine during cellar visits. As this white wine from les Poyeux was always reported to be extremely long-lived, there is no reason not to believe that their Brézé Blanc will follow suit and be another Clos Rougeard wine meant for long-term cellaring. I have only had a few vintages of Brézé over the years, so my experience with the wine is not particularly deep, but I have always been very impressed with this wine and fully expect top vintages to last fifty or more years in bottle as well. As I mentioned above, there is no set rule for the style of the Clos Rougeard Brézé bottling, and the wine can be done in a Sec, Demi-Sec or even a Moelleux style, depending on how the summer goes and where the particular stylistic strength of a given vintage will play out with this hectare of chenin blanc vines. The three vintages reported on below were all in the Demi-Sec range stylistically, so I am looking forward to tasting more iterations of Brézé in the future and seeing this *terroir* reflected through different stylistic prisms.

Saumur occupies a very interesting geological position in the Loire Valley, as the city and its surrounding vineyards are officially part of Anjou, but really share soils with the Touraine region that lies to the east. Their attachment to Anjou dates back centuries and centuries, when the Duke of Anjou seized the city and its environs from the Duke of Blois all the way back in 1025. As James Wilson writes in his invaluable tome, Terroir, it is underneath the vineyards here that the geology makes its transition “from the chalk terrains of the Paris Basin” and on to “the *old rocks* of the Massif Armoricaïn” that define the best-known appellations to the west in the heart of Anjou. The best vineyards of Saumur are placed on the *tuffeau* plateau that rises up to the south of the Loire River here, with the caves of the estates carved into the chalky plateau and the vineyards typically planted on top of this limestone mesa. For the parcels of Clos Rougeard, les Poyeux is on the plateau right next to the family domaine in Chacé (with the town pretty much surrounding the vineyard today), with a more sandy topsoil from years of windswept erosion, and le Bourg is situated in richer *argilo-calcaire* topsoils over the *tuffeau* that provide a sturdier structural chassis that demands further bottle aging to blossom. The twelve different parcels of vines that constitute the vineyard sources for the le Clos bottling have variations in *terroir*, but are generally all *tuffeau*-based soils. The chenin blanc vines planted in Brézé are on soils with more clay, as this is a bit further from the river, where this white grape has always excelled.

The Foucault brothers have always been staunch *terroirists*, tirelessly proselytizing for traditionally-styled wines from all corners of the globe defined by their underlying soils, and

particularly for their beloved wines of Saumur-Champigny. In many ways, Charly and Nadi Foucault have occupied a position in Saumur not dissimilar to Henri Mayer's role during his lifetime in Burgundy or Bruno Giacosa's in Neive, as each has been uncompromising in their allegiance to their own *terroirs* and through their life-long efforts in the vineyards and cellars, have inspired a younger generation of *vignerons* to eschew artifice, winemaking and viticultural shortcuts and to seek to make exemplary, artisanal wines that swim against the tide of commercial homogenization and sterile brand concepts. Their staunch stand against chemical products in the vineyards, following in their father's footsteps, were just one aspect of their pioneering role in Saumur-Champigny in the first half of their time at the head of Clos Rougeard, and their minimalist winemaking approach and commitment to long-lived, classic wines has been inspirational to many of the best young producers in the region in recent years. As Nadi Foucault wrote in an article on *terroir* several years ago, "if one interferes too much with the wine, using modern oenological techniques, one only dilutes its specificity, trivializing differences and destroying the philosophy of *terroir* wines" and in the end, "factory recipes then replace the mysteries that our *terroirs* still harbor." He eloquently concluded: "Wine, as a symbol of culture, should not be replaced by brand wines" synonymous with "the food-processing industry." Amen.

The following article is a bit dualistic in its foundation, as I was generously invited to participate in a stunning and very deep vertical tasting of the les Poyeux and le Bourg bottlings this past March that was organized here in New York by Michael Pitts and held, most appropriately, at Rouge Tomate in Chelsea. The wine program at Rouge Tomate is of course run by the lovely and indefatigable Pascaline Lepeltier, who originally hails from the city of Angers in the heart of the Loire Valley and is probably the most knowledgeable and passionate advocate of the wines of the Loire as any sommelier to be found in the United States. In fact, much of the background information for this article came from Pascaline, as for such a famous property as Clos Rougeard, the amount of published historical detail on the property is really quite scant. One gets the sense that the understated Foucault brothers had much to do with this over the years, as the property certainly was not publicity seeking back before their meteoric rise in popularity in the 1990s, and since that time, there has never been enough wine at Clos Rougeard to meet demand. This is reflected in the fact that the domaine has no placard on their entrance, and one simply has to know the address in Chacé if one hopes to keep a tasting appointment! I had hoped to organize a follow-up tasting of the other two principal bottlings from Clos Rougeard, their workhorse "le Clos" Saumur-Champigny and their Saumur Blanc "Brézé" to complete the preparation of the article in thorough fashion, but I was still too hobbled after my knee surgery to be able to get this accomplished before it was time to send out this new issue. Consequently, my notes on these two bottlings are not as deep as I would like, with all of these notes gleaned from Loire Valley articles that I have written in the not too distant past and reprinted here to give a more proper perspective on the wines of Clos Rougeard. Once my knee is again back at one hundred percent, I will get to work on a le Clos and Brézé tasting, so expect a proper Clos Rougeard follow-up piece a bit down the road.





*Older casks of the Brézé Blanc bottling aging quietly in the cellars at Clos Rougeard.*

### ***Saumur Blanc “Brézé”***

As touched upon above, the Brézé Saumur blanc bottling from Clos Rougeard hails from a one hectare parcel of chenin blanc vines in this fine vineyard, which lies in the southern part of the appellation, away from the riverbanks of the Loire and a few kilometers from the family domaine. The chenin blanc vines here are now more than sixty years of age, but the Foucault family has always allowed the personality of the vintage to dictate the style of this bottling, so it can be bottled as a Sec, Demi-Sec or even an occasional Moelleux, depending on how the vintage characteristics are best presented in the finished wine. This was the same practice as the family exercised with their small plot of chenin blanc vines planted in les Poyeux, which prior to the purchase of their single hectare of vines in Brézé in 1993, was the only white wine produced at Clos Rougeard and which was never commercially released. The Brézé Saumur blanc is raised in twenty percent new wood in each vintage, with the rest of the casks used for the *elevage* of this wine a range of older barrels. The wine almost never undergoes malolactic fermentation. This is a rare bottling, even by the stealth standards of Clos Rougeard, and I have only tasted a few vintages of it over the years. Based on my small sampling, this is clearly another wine that is built for extended cellaring and I cannot imagine that these wines in most top vintages will not last at least forty or fifty years. There are several reports from long-time visitors to the Foucault brothers’ cellars in Chacé over the years of the white wines produced from the parcel of chenin blanc in les Poyeux still drinking magnificently at eighty or ninety years of age, so it is very easy

to suppose that the Brézé Saumur Blanc is capable of evolving gracefully in bottle far in excess of fifty years in a top vintage! I hope to be able to report more fully on this bottling in the not too distant future.

### **2009 Saumur Blanc “Brézé”- Clos Rougeard**

The 2009 vintage of Clos Rougeard’s Saumur Blanc is drinking beautifully and offers up a deep, ripe and gently musky nose of pineapple, smoke, chalky minerality, fresh coconut and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and plenty solid at the core, with fine focus and grip and a long, still fairly primary, but wide open and zesty finish. More complexity will emerge here with further bottle age, but this is a riper year for this wine and it may get just a touch flabby as the years go by and it is not such a bad idea to be drinking bottles right now, while the girdle of acidity here is still quite vibrant. A lovely, big-boned beauty. 2015-2030+. **92+**.

### **2007 Saumur Blanc “Brézé”- Clos Rougeard**

The 2007 Brézé Blanc bottling from Clos Rougeard is a terrific wine in the making. This is a one hundred percent chenin blanc cuvée that is aged in a judicious bit of new wood and shows every sign (if premature oxidation does not rear its ugly head with this wine) of aging for several decades with great style and class. The deep, pure and complex nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of apple, orange zest, bee pollen, complex, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very tight out of the blocks, with a rock solid core of fruit, bright acids, excellent focus and balance and a very long, tight and racy finish. This will be a long distance runner, but it deserves at least four or five years in the cellar to uncoil. A beautiful wine. 2017-2040+. **94+**.

### **2002 Saumur Blanc “Brézé”- Clos Rougeard**

This dry chenin blanc-based wine is done in a white Burgundy style and is truly exceptional on both the nose and palate. At eight years of age the wine is blossoming beautifully, as it jumps from the glass in a complex and classy mélange of pineapple, gentle notes of honeycomb, lemon zest, leesy tones, a lovely base of soil and a nice framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and shows off fine mid-palate depth, with impressive complexity, excellent focus and a long, crisp and poised finish. Just a lovely bottle of wine that is just now beginning to reach its apogee of maturity and should drink beautifully for at least another fifteen years. 2010-2025+. **94**.

### ***Saumur-Champigny “le Clos”***

The le Clos bottling from Clos Rougeard is not a single vineyard wine, but rather a blend of twelve different parcels of vines scattered around the three villages of Chacé, Varrains and Dampierre in the Saumur-Champigny appellation. The twelve parcels combined amount to four and a half hectares, so this is the workhorse bottling from the domaine and always the easiest wine from the estate to come by in the marketplace. By the way, though the Foucault brothers have always referred to this cuvée as “le Clos”, the name does not appear anywhere on the label. While this may be the “entry level” bottling from Clos Rougeard, it is anything but a generic wine, as it is comprised primarily of old vines and is raised with the same attention to detail in the cellars as the two single vineyard wines. The vines in these twelve parcels range from twenty to more than eighty-five years of age, with only a small percentage actually younger vines, so the depth, soil signature and complexity that all of the Clos Rougeard wines are renowned for is very much in evidence in this outstanding wine. In fact, the le Clos is often my very favorite wine in

the domaine's lineup, or at least this is the case for the first twenty years out from the vintage, as the wine is raised entirely in older casks and does not need any extended time in bottle to integrate its new oak component, as is always the case with the more famous le Bourg bottling for example. The yields in these twelve different parcels are kept quite modest, with forty-five hectoliters per hectare the typical *rendement* for the vineyards. While most commentators focus exclusively on the les Poyeux and le Bourg single vineyard wines for long-term cellaring potential, I have always found the le Clos from the domaine a very, very long-lived wine as well and I have to imagine that its cellaring potential is not far short of the two single vineyard wines. The wine's *elevage* is always a bit shorter in cask than either le Bourg or les Poyeux, but the wine still starts out life with plenty of structure, well-integrated, firm tannins, and the le Clos really should not be touched in a typical vintage until it is at least a dozen years of age. There are a few more forward vintages, such as 2007, where it can drink a bit sooner, but this is after all a true Clos Rougeard wine and this means it will not reach its apogee until it has celebrated its twentieth birthday and last several decades beyond this. As I noted above, due to my limited mobility post-surgery, I did not manage to help orchestrate a le Clos vertical tasting, but there are plans on the drawing board to do so in the not too distant future, so I plan to revisit this bottling of Clos Rougeard in depth in a coming newsletter. In the meantime, other than the notes on the 2008 and 2006 le Clos that were generously brought by Tim Kopec to a François Cotat tasting at my home in February of this year, most of my other notes on le Clos that are featured below have already appeared in previous Loire Valley reports and I include them here just to give some sense of the quality of this bottling at Clos Rougeard.

#### **2008 Saumur-Champigny “le Clos”- Clos Rougeard**

The 2008 vintage of le Clos from the Foucault brothers is an absolute classic in the making, wafting from the glass in a refined and nascently complex constellation of cassis, a touch of currant leaf, sweet dark berries, violets, dark soil tones and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with great soil signature, excellent focus and grip, fine-grained tannins and a very long, refined and classy finish. This is still a fairly young wine and deserves at least a few more years in the cellar to more fully blossom before drinking, but its absolute apogee is probably still ten years down the road. 2020-2050+. **94.**

#### **2007 Saumur-Champigny “le Clos”- Clos Rougeard**

The 2007 le Clos bottling from Clos Rougeard is just coming into its own at age eight and is really starting to drink well, but a few more years in the cellar would really allow it to burst into full bloom. The deep, complex and very classy nose offers up a blend of dark berries, cassis, currant leaf, a touch of red berry with extended aeration, dark soil tones, gentle notes of roasted game and cigar smoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and perfectly balanced, with excellent mid-palate depth, moderate, fine-grained tannins and outstanding length and grip on the impeccable finish. Just a lovely bottle that will be even better with a few more years' worth of bottle age. 2015-2035+. **93+.**

#### **2006 Saumur-Champigny “le Clos”- Clos Rougeard**

The 2006 vintage of le Clos is another fine, fine bottle in the making, with its aromatic profile now starting to show a fair bit of secondary layers of complexity in its blend of dark berries, new leather, coffee bean, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and a blossoming topnote of tree bark. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and more earthy and soil-driven in personality than the more refined 2008 version, with moderate, suave tannins and excellent

length and grip on the complex finish. This is now ready to drink, though like the 2008, it will be even better with further bottle age. 2017-2040. **93.**

**2005 Saumur-Champigny “le Clos”- Clos Rougeard**

It is always a treat to taste the brilliant wines from the Foucault brothers at Clos Rougeard, and their newly released 2005s are every bit as brilliant as one would expect from a great estate in a great vintage. The 2005 Clos bottling offers up a beautifully complex nose of red berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, soil, gentle cedary notes, a touch of juniper and a lovely topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and laser-like in its focus, with tangy acids, lovely mid-palate depth, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip. The Clos bottling usually only sees a very modest percentage of new oak, and for this reason it is one of my favorites at the estate, despite the obviously superior raw materials of the Poyeux and the Bourg bottlings. The 2005 Clos deserves six to eight years of cellaring before serious consumption should be allowed to commence and should prove to easily last twenty-five to thirty years. A great vintage of this bottling! 2015-2045. **94+.**

**2004 Saumur-Champigny “le Clos”- Clos Rougeard**

With all of the excitement that surrounded the release of the 2005 vintage in the Loire, it was easy to lose sight of the fact that the 2004 vintage for the red wines of the top villages, such as Saumur, produced absolutely classic, poised and very cellar-worthy wines. The 2004 Clos from the Foucaults is a brilliant example of this vintage, as the wine offers up a complex and classy nose of red berries, menthol, coffee, charred wood, black cherries, fresh herbs and the first stirrings of the forest floor to come. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and seamless, with a fine core of fruit, impeccable balance, fine-grained tannins, lovely acids and a very long, refined and youthful finish. Just a beautiful bottle in the making. 2012-2030+. **93.**

**2003 Saumur-Champigny “le Clos”- Clos Rougeard**

I am probably one of the few people who walks into the famous Beaune restaurant of Ma Cuisine thinking about drinking Clos Rougeard wines, but they always have a few on the list, and after a long day of tasting red and white Burgundies from sun up to sundown, a change in varietal is sometimes called for at dinner. The 2003 Clos bottling from Clos Rougeard was plucked off the Ma Cuisine list last November and was still a few years away from primetime drinking, but is clearly one of the best red wines made in France in this torrid vintage. The nose offers up a deep and very fresh mélange of red berries, juniper, woodsmoke, a touch of *gibier*, gentle notes of menthol, bell pepper and a bit of youthful barnyard still to resolve. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully complex, with exquisite balance, moderate, quite ripe tannins, tangy acids and superb length and grip on the youthful and poised finish. This will be a terrific bottle in a few more years. 2013-2040. **93.**

**1997 Saumur-Champigny “le Clos”- Clos Rougeard**

This bottle was drunk in New York in the spring at a dinner where virtually every Clos Rougeard fan (and there were several) at the table opined that as good as are the single vineyard bottlings from the domaine, the real cherry in the lineup of the Foucault wines is the un-oaked le Clos bottling, as it gives clearest voice to the underlying *terroir*. The 1997 is excellent and is just really beginning to drink well, though it is decidedly less evolved than the 1996 (see below). The nose offers up a complex and compelling mix of dark berries, chicory, mocha, a touch of grilled meat, ground pepper, complex soil tones and mature Clos Vougeot-like notes of bonfire. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and complex, with excellent focus and grip, and a long finish that closes with an intriguing, almost leafy nuance. Fine juice that should continue to improve, and may eventually eclipse the 1996 which is currently at its apogee. 2007-2020+. **93+.**



### **1996 Saumur-Champigny “le Clos”- Clos Rougeard**

A good friend who arrived in Burgundy a few days after I did in early July spotted this wine on the wine list at one of the restaurants in Beaune and was able to buy a bottle to share back at our hotel, and prime the pump for our visit together to the Loire that was to commence a few days later. I am hoping that it is still available on the wine list in Beaune when I go back to taste the 2006 Burgundy vintage in November, as this is a magical bottle of wine. Ten years of bottle age has done this wine proud, as it soars from the glass in a very St. Émilion-like mélange of dark berries, cassis, menthol, tobacco leaf, woodsmoke and a great base of complex soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and very, very complex, with great intensity of flavor, haunting balance and focus, very little remaining tannins, but a firm girdle of acidity to keep it fresh and light on its feet for many years to come and a brilliant long finish. Just a superb bottle of wine with the aromatic profile of St. Émilion and the tang and ethereal depth of great Burgundy. In other words, classic and outstanding Saumur-Champigny. 2007-2017. **94.**

### ***Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeux”***

The les Poyeux bottling from Clos Rougeard is from a three hectare vineyard that is now approaching fifty years of age, planted on more sandy topsoils than the le Bourg. This is a windy plateau vineyard and the sand has been blown in here over the centuries and mixed with the thin

layer of chalky and clay topsoil, over a profound base of *tuffeau*. This was the very first vineyard that the Foucault family ever farmed in Saumur-Champigny and they have been producing a single vineyard wine from this site now for more than a century. Yields here are generally in the thirty-five to forty-five hectoliter per hectare range. The exposition of les Poyeux is due south, allowing for excellent ripening, despite the often very windy conditions here. Due perhaps to the sandier *terroir*, or the slightly younger vine age, the Foucaults have never chosen to raise les Poyeux in new oak, but entirely in one wine barrels, with the length of *elevage* again ranging from eighteen to twenty-four months prior to bottling. The Foucault brothers had always sourced the vast majority of their one wine casks for this bottling from Château Margaux (not a bad place to shop for top of the line, used cooperage!), but in the last few years, they started buying the bulk of their used barrels for the les Poyeux bottling from Château Cheval Blanc. One article in French that I read on Clos Rougeard stated that usually eighty percent of the casks for les Poyeux's *elevage* each year would hail from Château Margaux, with the other twenty percent sourced from other elite addresses such as Latour, Pétrus or Romanée-Conti, but I have not seen this repeated in any of the other research that I have culled through in preparation of this article. The les Poyeux cuvée typically spends the same amount of time in cask as le Bourg, but due to its not seeing any new wood, it is generally the more approachable of the two single vineyard bottlings at Clos Rougeard, as it does not need an extended period of bottle age to fully integrate its new wood. However, it is every bit as long-lived as Le Bourg and it is my impression that in most top vintages, it is foolhardy to be opening bottles of les Poyeux until the wine is at least twenty years out from the vintage. Les Poyeux is typically the more red fruity in personality of the two single vineyard bottlings, but this can vary a bit from vintage to vintage and it is my impression that its more red fruity side tends to come to the fore in the more completely ripe vintages like 2005 or 2010. In cooler years like 2008 or 2004, the wine tends more to the black fruity side of the ledger. It can certainly be drunk earlier in its evolution with great pleasure, as it is always very elegantly balanced, but the inherent complexity of this great wine does not fully come to the foreground until at least a couple of decades have passed from its bottling. It is easily a wine that can last at least seventy-five or a hundred years in a top vintage like 2005 or 2010!

### **2010 Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeux”- Clos Rougeard**

The 2010 Poyeux has not yet closed down for a period of hibernation and consequently the wine is absolutely singing with youthful exuberance at present. The bouquet soars from the glass in a pure and nascently complex blend of cherries, a touch of pomegranate, cocoa powder, cigar wrapper, gentle notes of menthol and vanillin oak and a glorious base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with simply superb, seamless balance, a great core of sappy fruit, stellar transparency, suave tannins and impeccable focus and grip on the long and oh, so promising finish. This will be a very red fruity vintage of Poyeux and should prove to be one of the very finest here in the last quarter century! 2025-2085+. 97.

### **2008 Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeux”- Clos Rougeard**

Given how refined the 2008 le Clos is showing today, I was expecting the two cru bottlings from Clos Rougeard to also be quite elegant in profile at the present time, but the Poyeux and Bourg are both hunkered down for hibernation and a bit grumpy in personality at the present time. The 2008 Poyeux offers up a youthful and still quite reserved bouquet of cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of tariness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, good soil signature, firm, ripe



tannins and lovely balance on the very, very long, but still very youthful finish. This will be a more black fruity vintage of Poyeux than the 2010, but it should prove to be outstanding when it has blossomed. But, it will need some bottle age to really start to drink again with generosity. 2025-2075. **94+**.

#### **2007 Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeux”- Clos Rougeard**

The 2007 Les Poyeux from Clos Rougeard is another truly excellent example of the vintage, offering up a deep and classy aromatic mélange of red and black cherries, coffee, woodsmoke, gamebirds, a touch of youthful medicinal tones and a stylish base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very tangy, with ripe, measured tannins, lovely nascent complexity, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long, perfectly balanced finish. This is more closed than the 2007 le Bourg out of the blocks and will want a few more years in the cellar, but this too is a truly superb wine in the making. 2019-2040+. **93+**.

#### **2005 Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeux”- Clos Rougeard**

The 2005 Poyeux will vie with the 2010 as one of the greatest recent vintages of this great wine, and my gut instinct is that this will go down in history as one of the top handful of vintages of this wine in the entire history of the domaine! The wine is still quite youthful and demands at least another dozen years in the cellar before it will really reach its apogee, but it is so beautifully balanced that it is very easy today to see its future greatness. The bouquet is deep, pure and sappy, offering up a fine constellation of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, a complex base of soil, tobacco leaf, gentle smokiness and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with great focus and grip, seamless balance and great nascent complexity already in evidence on the very, very long, suavely tannic and tangy finish. The bright acids of the 2005 vintage will make this extraordinary wine extremely long-lived. To my palate, this is the greatest young vintage of Poyeux I have ever tasted! 2030-2100+. **98+**.

#### **2004 Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeux”- Clos Rougeard**

The 2004 Poyeux is a beautiful bottle of Saumur that may not be able to give the superb 2005 a run for its money, but which will still be outstanding at full maturity. The deep and complex nose is stellar, as it offers up scents of dark berries, cherries, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, a lovely base of soil, espresso, delicate peppery tones and a topnote of grilled meat. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and tangy, with beautiful focus, fine mid-palate depth, moderate tannins and stellar length and grip on the finish. This is a terrific bottle that will age gracefully for a very long time, but should come forward many years before the slightly more powerfully-built 2005 Poyeux. 2012-2035+. **94**.

#### **2003 Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeux”- Clos Rougeard**

The 2003 les Poyeux from Clos Rougeard showed so much better the last time I tasted it that I wondered if this bottle at our vertical was somehow not representative. I last tasted this wine three years ago, so perhaps the wine has just not evolved in the direction I anticipated, but in any case, this most recent example showed heavy influence of this torrid growing season in its very ripe and idiosyncratic bouquet of baked cherries, figs, chocolate, hung game and cigar wrapper. On the palate the wine is deep and complex, but also broad and rather flat in profile, with low acids, a plush core and a relatively long, easy-going finish. The structure and focus of the previous bottle were not in evidence this time around, and though this is still a solid effort for a very challenging vintage, I had far higher expectations for this wine based on its previous showing, where it showed beautifully. Representative? 2017-2035+. **89?**

## **2002 Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeux”- Clos Rougeard**

I love the 2002 vintage for red wines of the central Loire and the '02 Poyeux is absolutely stunning. This is a very classically balanced vintage of this great wine and is now approaching its peak, but there is still another layer of complexity lurking here below the surface and a bit more patience will certainly be rewarded! The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of cherries, a touch of sweet dark berry, woodsmoke, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, hints of pomegranate and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, young and vibrant, with a lovely core, superb soil signature, suave, modest tannins and great length and grip on the impeccably balanced finish. This is a great vintage and it is almost at its apogee, but give it just a few more years to completely peak! 2022-2075+. **96+**.

## **1996 Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeux”- Clos Rougeard**

The 1996 vintage of Poyeux has reached a lovely stage of development at age twenty-one and is now drinking with plenty of style and grace. The complex, black fruity bouquet delivers a lovely mix of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, espresso, dark soil tones, hints of chipotle pepper and just a whiff of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit more red fruity than the nose suggests, with a lovely core, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. There is still a touch of backend tannin here, but the '96 Poyeux is now fully into its peak of maturity and drinking with plenty of personality. 2017-2050. **94**.

## **1990 Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeux”- Clos Rougeard**

The 1990 les Poyeux is an outstanding wine that is also now fully mature, but has decades of fine drinking still ahead of it. The excellent and complex nose wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, plenty of smokiness and an exotic topnote of dried lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very, very long, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, melting tannins and fine focus and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2017-2040. **95**.

## **1989 Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeux”- Clos Rougeard**

The 1989 vintage of les Poyeux from Clos Rougeard is absolutely stunning. The grapes were plenty ripe here, giving natural alcohol levels of 13.8 percent, but there is not a single trace of *sur maturité* and this is a wine of great purity and bottomless depth. The superb bouquet delivers scents of red berries, pomegranate, coffee, menthol, cigar wrapper, glorious soil tones and just a whisper of vanillin oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure on the attack, with great focus and grip, a glorious core of fruit, melting tannins and a very, very long, complex and soil-driven finish. The 1989 Poyeux is a bit more powerful in personality than the equally stunning 1990 version, but still every bit as elegant! A great wine that is now into its apogee, but has decades of life still ahead of it. 2017-2050. **95**.

## **1985 Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeux”- Clos Rougeard**

The 1985 vintage for Loire Valley reds is absolutely classical in style, without the extra element of ripeness one found in 1989 or 1990, but with everything in perfect measure and the les Poyeux has aged extremely well as a result. The bouquet offers up a beautiful and quite refined constellation of red and black cherries, lovely soil tones, a touch of menthol, coffee and a gentle topnote of nuttiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and displays lovely mid-palate depth, with melted tannins, lovely focus and grip and a very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. At age thirty-two, the '85 les Poyeux is at its peak of maturity, but still had many, many years of life ahead of it. A beautiful wine. 2017-2040. **94**.

### 1976 Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeux”- Clos Rougeard

At our vertical tasting, the 1976 vintage of les Poyeux was a bit controversial, with some tasters thinking that our bottle was not representative of the wine, whereas others had drunk bottles that were very similar in profile. This was an extreme drought vintage in the central Loire and the wine is hardly classic in aromatic profile today (or at least this is the case with this particular bottle), offering up a bouquet of dried berries, botanical tones, espresso, a touch of chipotle peppers and an odd, almost varnish-like overtone that eventually blew off with some extended aeration. On the palate the wine is medium-full and complex, but notably short on the backend, with little remaining tannin. Having never had the wine previously, I was really not sure what to make of this bottle. ???



### Saumur-Champigny “le Bourg”

The le Bourg bottling hails from the Foucault family’s oldest vines, being crafted from a one hectare parcel of seventy to more than one hundred year-old cabernet franc vines planted on a thin base of clay over a deep bed of *tuffeau* and chalk. This vineyard lies just behind the domaine itself in the village of Chacé. These old vines produce slightly smaller yields than in les Poyeux, so croploads are generally in the thirty to thirty-five hectoliter per hectare range here. The frosts of 1991 damaged a number of the older vines in le Bourg, which subsequently had to be replanted, with the production from these younger vines still going into the le Clos bottling at the time of this article, so that le Bourg remains a completely old vine cuvée. The wine is barrel-fermented and raised entirely in new oak, with the *elevage* ranging from eighteen to twenty-four

months, depending on the style of the vintage. It is bottled unfinned and unfiltered. The Foucault brothers always have selected a medium to medium-plus toast for the casks used to raise the le Bourg bottling in, and consequently, this wine emphatically needs bottle age to absorb its new wood component completely and allow the other elements inherent in the wine to start to take center stage. The domaine strongly believes that this is their potentially longest-live red wine and I see no reason not to accept this, though I have yet to taste any example of les Poyeux or le Clos that is getting anywhere near the end of its plateau! With the higher percentage of clay in the topsoil of le Bourg, this is always a broader-shouldered wine than les Poyeux, with the older vines adding an extra element of depth at the core to fill out these shoulders. The new oak that the wine is raised in each year is fairly toasty out of the blocks and takes plenty of time to start to recede into the background, but it does this very nicely with sufficient bottle age and it plays a lovely, supporting role in the wine by the time le Bourg is fully mature, which again, really is at least twenty years out from the vintage. In my experience, le Bourg is the more black fruity and meatier wine than les Poyeux, and the red fruity tones that one finds in some vintages of les Poyeux are seldom echoed in this wine. Like the les Poyeux, it is one of the greatest red wines of France!

#### **2010 Saumur-Champigny “le Bourg”- Clos Rougeard**

The 2010 le Bourg from Clos Rougeard shares the same elegant personality as the les Poyeux in this outstanding vintage, but is of course, more black fruity in personality. The deep and still quite youthful bouquet delivers a fine combination of black cherries, dark berries, toasty oak, cigar ash, dark soil tones and incipient notes of meatiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary in personality, with a rock solid core, beautiful focus and balance, ripe, fine-grained tannins and outstanding length and grip on the very, very promising finish. This will be a terrific vintage of le Bourg in the fullness of time, but bury those bottles deep for the time being! 2030-2100. **96.**

#### **2008 Saumur-Champigny “le Bourg”- Clos Rougeard**

The 2008 le Bourg is currently quite shut down and is best left alone in a cool corner of the cellar for the next eight to ten years, but it will be an outstanding wine when it starts to stir. The bouquet is reserved, but also deep and pure, offering up scents of cassis, grilled meats, toasty oak, a touch of creosote, dark soil tones and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and very deep at the core, with excellent soil signature underneath its new wood component, lovely focus and balance, ripe tannins and a very, very long, nascently complex and promising finish. 2025-2075. **94+.**

#### **2007 Saumur-Champigny “le Bourg”- Clos Rougeard**

The 2007 le Bourg is a beautiful and very transparent young vintage for this outstanding wine. The deep, complex and very classy nose offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, coffee, fresh herbs, a lovely base of soil and a deft touch of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very accessible out of the blocks (particularly for this sturdy cuvée), with moderate tannins, outstanding focus, a sappy core of fruit and lovely length and grip on the pure and nascently complex finish. This is a simply stellar example of the 2007 vintage! 2014-2040+. **93+.**

#### **2006 Saumur-Champigny “le Bourg”- Clos Rougeard (served from magnum)**

The 2006 Le Bourg out of magnum is still a pretty young customer, but the promise of this superb wine is already very much in evidence on both the nose and palate. The deep and fairly powerful nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of cassis, dark berries, a bit of balsam

bough, smoke, tarry overtones and a fair bit of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very primary, with a rock solid core of fruit, lovely focus and balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins and outstanding grip on the very long and palate-staining finish. Granted this is a magnum and that much further behind in development than a regular-sized bottle, but the 2006 Le Bourg is a very classically structured example of this fine wine and it will need another seven or eight years to really start to come into its own and show off all of its considerable potential. But, clearly the wait here will be very handsomely rewarded! 2019-2050. **94+.**

**2005 Saumur-Champigny “le Bourg”- Clos Rougeard**

The 2005 le Bourg from the Foucault brothers is every bit as brilliant as the les Poyeux in this vintage, but it will need some extended cellaring to really start to offer up serious generosity on the palate. However, the bouquet is already starting to show beautifully, as the new wood has been nicely absorbed into the mosaic of the nose, with scents of dark berries, black cherries, cigar ash, complex soil tones and gentle meatiness now taking precedence over the toasty oak undertow. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and bottomless in its depth, with firm, fine-grained tannins, a great soil signature emerging and outstanding length and grip on the vibrant, tangy and very, very promising finish. All this great wine needs is more time in the cellar! 2030-2100. **98.**

**2003 Saumur-Champigny “le Bourg”- Clos Rougeard**

Whereas I had drunk a very impressive bottle of 2003 les Poyeux a few years back, this was the first time I had ever tasted the 2003 le Bourg and I liked it quite a bit better than the les Poyeux served alongside of it. The bouquet is quite pure and classic for this blistering summer, delivering a fine mélange of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, cigar wrapper and a nice framing of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and complex, with a good core, better structure and grip than the les Poyeux and a long, nicely balanced finish. This is a very good wine that is drinking quite nicely at the present time, and though it is not a classic example of le Bourg, for drinking over the next twenty years or so, there is plenty of enjoyment to be had here. 2017-2035. **92.**

**2002 Saumur-Champigny “le Bourg”- Clos Rougeard**

The 2002 vintage of le Bourg is everything one can imagine from the synthesis of a great *terroir* and a top flight vintage, with the wine offering up an outstanding and wide open nose of black cherries, cassis, grilled meats, toasty oak, dark soil tones and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with a rock solid core, great focus and grip, moderate, seamless tannins and outstanding length and grip on the poised and still fairly youthful finish. Whereas the bouquet is generous and showing a fine degree of maturity, the wine is still a tad on the young side on the palate and more bottle age will be rewarded in a more completely blossomed wine. This will be a really long-lived vintage of le Bourg, so there is no sense in rushing to drink bottles today, despite how beautifully the wine is showing aromatically! 2027-2075+. **96.**

**1997 Saumur-Champigny “le Bourg”- Clos Rougeard**

1997 was a very warm year in the Loire and this shows a bit on the '97 le Bourg, which is now fully mature at age twenty and drinking beautifully, but will probably not be one of the longest-lived years for this fine cuvée. The tertiary nose offers up a fine constellation of cassis, charred wood, game, dark soil tones, nutskin, cigar ash and smoky oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with lovely mid-palate depth, impressive focus and grip and a very long, gently tannic and wide open finish. This vintage of le Bourg still has plenty of life

ahead of it, but it is now squarely at its peak of maturity and this is a fine moment to be drinking bottles of this vintage. 2017-2040. **93.**

**1996 Saumur-Champigny “le Bourg”- Clos Rougeard**

The 1996 le Bourg from Clos Rougeard is an outstanding wine, with bright acids adding a touch more precision on both the nose and palate *vis à vis* both the 1997 and 1995 versions. The nose jumps from the glass in a complex and classy combination of cassis, dark soil tones, espresso, a touch of grilled meats, toasty oak, cigar ash, incipient nuttiness and just a whisper of chipotle pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely tangy in personality, with a rock solid core, excellent transparency, melting tannins and lovely balance on the focused, complex and very refined finish. I really like this vintage of le Bourg for current drinking and expect it could still improve with further bottle age. 2017-2050+. **94+.**

**1995 Saumur-Champigny “le Bourg”- Clos Rougeard**

The 1995 vintage of le Bourg is a touch leaner than the 1997 that was paired up with it at our vertical tasting, but it counters its slightly less plush personality with a bit more precision and soil specificity than the slightly more generously fruity 1997. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex and mature blend of red and black cherries, cigar ash, complex soil tones that are just starting to hint at autumnal shadings, beautifully absorbed new wood and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full-bodied, with a very soil-driven personality, suave, melting tannins and excellent length and grip on the poised and very nicely balanced finish. This is different in personality than the 1997 (as it should be, given the variations in vintage style), but every bit as high quality and enjoyable to drink today. 2017-2050. **93.**

**1990 Saumur-Champigny “le Bourg”- Clos Rougeard**

The 1990 vintage has produced a very, very good example of le Bourg, but interestingly, this wine does not seem to have quite the same core of fruit in reserve today as is found in the 1990 les Poyeux. The wine delivers a fine and complex aromatic constellation of black cherries, cassis, dark soil tones, cigar ash, woodsmoke, a touch of walnut and a gentle topnote of chipotle peppers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with very good, but not great depth at the core, fine focus and grip, lovely balance and a very long, soil-driven and classy finish. I am not sure why the slightly older vines in le Bourg did not provide quite the same depth at the core as the les Poyeux in this fine vintage (though the crop load in general was quite high in 1990 in the region), but this is only a very, very minor complaint against a wine that is in all other respects, completely satisfying! 2017-2040+. **94.**



## THE BEAUTIFULLY RIPE 1959 BORDEAUX VINTAGE



*The chais and chateau, as seen across the vineyards, at Château l'Evangile .*

I have always loved the legendary 1959 vintage in Bordeaux, which is probably the vintage from this era with which I have had the most tasting experience with over the years. Back when I started out in the wine trade in the early 1980s, the 1959 vintage was probably the best value to be had amongst the legendary years of claret in the post-World War II period, as already at this time, the 1961s were quite expensive (by the standards of the day). Consequently, the 1959s were the great old wines that I looked for with regularity for special tastings, as they were generally fifty to sixty percent of the price of the corresponding 1961. Given that the quality of the two vintages, at least to my palate, has always been quite close (albeit quite different stylistically), it was very easy for a junior member of the wine trade to opt for spending his savings on the occasional 1959, rather than 1961s when the rare opportunity popped up to buy and drink a bottle from one of the towering vintages of yesteryear. While the reputation of the 1959 vintage in Bordeaux has always been quite good, the wines have gained in appreciation within the marketplace in the last couple of decades and their proper place, nipping at the heels of the 1961s, is now generally recognized and the wines are every bit as respected as they deserve today. However, they were just a touch forgotten back in my early days in the business, as the 1961s had eclipsed them in the minds of many claret lovers back in this era, perhaps owing to the very different styles of the two vintages. The 1961s, which were deep, structured and utterly classical in profile in their relative youths, owing their brilliant quality to the

extremely low yields of the vintage and the flawless *fin de saison* of '61, were the kind of wines that captured the hearts and imaginations of every Bordeaux lover back in those early days, while the riper, more plush and exuberant 1959s were looked at slightly askance as being a bit atypical, albeit still outstanding in quality. But, much of the appreciation of these two great years in their relatively early days would have been a reflection of the palate preferences of the era, with claret most prized for its restraint and structural precision back in the old days, and if the two vintages came along today, where power and ripeness are more prized in many Bordeaux-drinking circles, it is easy to imagine that the 1959s might well be the more highly-praised vintage of the two in our modern market!

In any event, I have been working on this feature on the beautiful 1959 Bordeaux vintage now for several years, but until very recently, it has been waiting in the wings for recent notes on three of the most important wines of the vintage: Lafite-Rothschild, Latour and Mouton-Rothschild, which I had not tasted bottles of for more than a decade. Given the historical importance of these three First Growths in the 1959 vintage (Mouton of course was still officially a Second Growth in 1959, as its promotion would not occur until 1973, but the sublime quality of the 1959 Mouton is no doubt one of the cornerstone vintages on which its promotion was based), I could not imagine publishing this feature without notes on these three great wines. So the article has been on the “to do list” for a handful of years now, as somehow I have managed to not cross paths with any of these three great Pauillacs in recent times. I have had the good fortune to drink all three wines occasionally over the years, but my luck had not been great in the last eight to ten years and none of the Big Three in Pauillac had come my way in more recent times. So, this report remained on the back burner until a very recent claret tasting organized by my friend Omar Khan and held at Crystal Springs in Sussex County, New Jersey (which happens to have one of the deepest old Bordeaux wine lists I have ever seen) allowed for the missing gap in the article to be finally and very happily filled in, as circumstances allowed for us to drink all three of these legendary 1959 wines together on the same evening!

Like the 1961 vintage, the 1959 vintage in Bordeaux was one produced from relatively small yields, but the quantity of wine produced was not quite as small as would be the case two years later. The harvest began on September 22<sup>nd</sup> in 1959 and the wines from both sides of the Gironde have long had a very good reputation, despite the fact that Pomerol and St. Émilion were only a couple of years removed from the devastating frost damage of 1956. It seems likely that the fine quality of the '59 Pomerols that I have tasted are a reflection of the quality that one may find when fruit from the “third leaf” is included in the blends, as with young vines, the third year after the vines go into the ground produces the highest quality and most intensely flavored fruit that the vines will produce for the first two decades of their lives and great wine can truly be made from this “third leaf”. But that said, not everyone has been as enthusiastic through the years about the '59 vintage as one might imagine today (now that the vintage's reputation is very well established), as important Bordeaux commentators based in the United Kingdom, such as Edmund Penning-Rowsell and David Peppercorn have always grouped this in the “good, but not great” category of Bordeaux vintages from this era. For example, here is Edmund Penning-Rowsell writing about 1959 claret in his book, The Wines of Bordeaux back in 1969: “It is now generally agreed that '59 is not quite such a fine year as originally thought, as there is a certain lack of acidity in many of the wines, so they are rather soft and lack stamina.” The consensus amongst commentators of this era was that the initial high praise for the 1959s had more to do

with the fact that it was the first “good” vintage in Bordeaux since 1955, after the very difficult years of 1956, 1957 and 1958, and much of the early, overly enthusiastic compliments paid to the vintage originated with the wine trade, which needed something to spark interest in the Bordeaux market again after a string of poor vintages.

Or, as David Peppercorn put it when writing in Bordeaux in 1982 about the '59 vintage, “it is probably fair to say that the reputation of the 1959 suffered from over-extravagant praise at the start”, for the wines “probably lack a little backbone to make them really great.” However, he does go on to call it a “classic vintage”, perhaps hedging his bets a bit, though he writes at the time that some of the wines are already starting to show a bit “dry” and may not be built for the long haul. The primary concern of these English wine writers of yesteryear seems to have been the relatively low acidity of the '59 vintage and the general distrust of years that come out of very hot summers, such as was the case in 1959. While I do understand and share some of these prejudices, often finding my favorite expressions of a given wine in higher acid and slightly “cooler” vintages, I have been a fan of the 1959s ever since I first tasted my first bottle all the way back in the early 1980s and nothing I have drunk subsequently has dissuaded me from the impression that this is truly one of the greatest vintages of the second half of the twentieth century. Robert Parker, whose palate is not always in harmonic convergence with mine, actually is far more aligned with my perceptions of the 1959s, as he heaps praise on the vintage in general, with the caveat that it is far stronger on the Left Bank and in the Graves than in St. Émilion and Pomerol, again citing the devastating frosts of 1956 on the Right Bank. My luck with the 1959s that I have drunk in recent years from the communes of Pomerol and St. Émilion has not indicated to me that the top wines here are any less exalted than the best wines to be found in the Médoc or Graves and my gut feeling is that the lack of enthusiasm for the Right Bank in 1959 had more to do with the knowledge of the serious frost damage of 1956, rather than the actual quality of the Right Bank wines of 1959, as many simply assumed that it was too soon for the Right Bank to have bounced back from that serious depredation.

In terms of the early allegations that the 1959 Bordeaux vintage would not stand the test of time, due to the relatively low acidity of the wines, this has proven to be completely incorrect and if anything, the vintage has aged at a very relaxed pace and continues to drink with great vibrancy and exuberance even as it closes in on its sixtieth birthday. The heat of the summer of '59 produced wines with marvelous depth of fruit, which was bursting at the seams in many of the wines from a very early age and which has remained nicely dense and voluptuous as the years have rolled by. That said, this never was a vintage that was particularly out of the ordinary in terms of size and shape, as many of these plush, velvety wines were in the twelve to twelve and a half percent alcohol range, so they are hardly atypical for claret in a riper vintage in this era. This is a far cry from some of the ripe vintages on the Gironde in recent times, with alcohols at 14.5 to more than fifteen percent, and I would fully expect that these modern, ripe Bordeaux vintages to fall victims to their heady octane levels, age rather poorly and have quite short shelf lives by the standards of traditional claret. But, high octane was never one of the potential pitfalls of the 1959s and their superb balance has been one of the key components of their superb longevity. Many of the wines of the vintage do have a slightly roasted quality to the fruit tones—take for example the glorious 1959 Haut-Brion— but this has never been synonymous with overripe notes of *sur maturité*, and the wines show excellent purity, complexity and underlying soil tones to go along with the glorious fruit of the vintage. Modern vintages that may well share

some stylistic similarities with the 1959s would include 1982 and 1989, though both of these years were characterized by far larger crop loads than the low yields of 1959, and it will be interesting to follow these two top vintages of the 1980s and see if they can match the beauty and longevity of the 1959s at these higher production levels. My gut feeling is that they will not quite reach the same level of sustained beauty, due to their much higher yields, but time will tell.



I find the style of the 1959 clarets to be quite irresistible, as they continue to be defined by generous levels of gently roasted fruit tones, running more to the black fruity side of the ledger in most wines- even those that are often awash in more red fruity tones such as Ausone, Trotanoy and Magdelaine. While the wines have always had beautifully plush fruit, there has always been a sense of marvelous density to the fruit component of the 1959s, no doubt due to the low yields, and consequently the wines have never had any issue of being all “puppy fat” on top and lacking the inner concentration of a truly great year. Rather, they have been dense and detailed since at least the time that I began drinking them in the early 1980s, and time has simply not seemed able of touching the fruit component of the 1959 Bordeaux vintage, so the wines remain nicely loaded with fruit even in the present day. At the same time, this is a vintage that is emphatically not only about the fruit, as the wines have never lacked for *typicité* in the way that a modern torrid vintage like 2003 does, and each and every wine has always been very true to its underlying house style and sense of *terroir*. Though the summer of '59 was plenty warm, the wines have always had good underlying structural stability, with plenty of ripe, well-integrated

tannins, and this chassis of tannin still remains to a certain degree in all of the very top wines of the vintage, now seamlessly melting away, but still sufficiently present to promise many more decades of outstanding drinking. As alluded to in some of the English writers early comments on the vintage, 1959 is a lower acid vintage, but not to the extent that this calls into question the overall balance of the wines and indeed, the wines have aged gloriously over the years and still remain loaded with energy and complex personality.

Today, as the wines close in on their sixtieth birthdays, they remain very much in their plateaus of peak drinkability- at least the top Classed Growths- and this is true on both sides of the Gironde. As the notes below will attest, I have drunk plenty of Right Bank 1959s in the last handful of years and I reiterate that the vintage is far stronger on this side of the Gironde than many commentators make out in their reports on the 1959s. In fact, I do not see any discernible difference in quality level between the two banks and would rank the Right Bank '59s up at the same exalted level as the Left Bank wines in this vintage. For most of the top 1959s, there remains decades of life still ahead of them and many will reach the century mark still sound, vigorous and with plenty of enjoyment to be shared. It is truly a remarkable vintage and very much deserving of the highest praise. It does not possess the inherent elegance and perfume of legendary vintages such as 1949, 1953 or 1961, but it has other attributes in its more plush personality that make up for perhaps a bit of the missing perfume of the most successfully refined vintages of the post-war period. I far prefer 1959 to a vintage such as 1947, for it is less "roasted" in personality and less prone to volatility than 1947, and after the 1961 vintage, there is nothing that comes along in the annals of Bordeaux that matches the sustained quality of the 1959s until perhaps one reaches the 1982 vintage. As I said above, it remains to be seen if the 1982s, with their higher yields and more modern winemaking will be able to match the longevity and brilliant evolution of the 1959s, but it does seem possible that 1982 will be the next great vintage cast somewhat in the mold of the 1959s.

The following wines are arranged geographically, with the Right Bank communes of Pomerol and St. Émilion listed first, followed by the Graves and then the Médoc communes listed from south to north. As I mentioned at the outset, I had been planning this article for several years, so you will find some notes that date back six or seven years at this point, but based on the many 1959s that I have drunk in the last year, I have little doubt that the slightly older notes remain accurate and reflective of the wines today. In each communal section, the wines are listed alphabetically, and I have also included my impressions on other 1959s from each commune that I have not drunk in the last few years, but which I have had ample experience with in earlier times. This has been one of my favorite Bordeaux vintages for many, many years and I have drunk these wines whenever circumstance has allowed and I cannot recommend them highly enough at their present age, as they can often offer better value than whatever over-heated commodity wine is being championed from more recent times.

### ***Pomerol***

*I have done a pretty good job drinking 1959 Pomerols in recent times, and there are only a handful of wines that I have not tasted in the last several years. La Conseillante I have only had once or twice over the years and it was always superb, with the inherent elegance of this property dovetailing beautifully with the more powerful style of the vintage. I cannot recall tasting either Pétrus or Lafleur in this vintage in the last couple of decades, but they were fine*

*and still young when I saw them way back in the day. I have never had '59 Rouget, but this was a good producer back in this era and I would imagine that this is a very good wine in the vintage. I should also mention that my most recent note on the 1959 Château l'Evangile hails from a Belgian bottling and is quite tasty, but I have had the château-bottled wine as well in the past and it is a step up in purity and vigor.*

### **1959 Château l'Evangile (Belgian Bottling)**

The name of the Belgian merchant who bottled this example of the 1959 Château l'Evangile was illegible on the old and fraying label, but the wine was still quite sound and drinking very well indeed. The bouquet is deep, complex and beautifully resolved, wafting from the glass in a mix of raspberries, plums, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones, a fine base of soil and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite plush on the attack, with a good core, melted tannins, impressive complexity and a very long, soft and velvety finish. I have never had the estate-bottled 1959 l'Evangile, so I have no point of reference for how this Belgian bottling stacks up, but my gut instinct is that the château bottling might still have a bit more structure in evidence and be a candidate for a bit more longevity than this very pretty, but decidedly *à point* version. But, a lovely wine for current drinking. 2010-2020+? **89.**

### **1959 Château Latour à Pomerol**

Our vertical tasting in February was the first time I had ever had a chance to taste the legendary 1959 Latour à Pomerol and the wine is everything it is reputed to be. The utterly brilliant bouquet offers up a bottomless blend of plums, black cherries, nutskin, roasted gamebird, menthol, dark soil tones and lovely top end smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and plush in personality, with a rock solid core of sappy fruit, melted tannins and impeccable focus and grip on the perfectly balanced, velvety and utterly seamless finish. This is a monumental vintage of Latour à Pomerol, which makes sense, as the replanted vines after the frost of 1956 would have been in their “third leaf” and *vignerons* will tell you that young vines produced their finest fruit in this year, after which, they do not attain the same intensity until they cross the twenty year threshold. A brilliant '59! 2016-2040. **96+.**

### **1959 Château La Pointe**

I do not have much experience with the La Pointes from this era, but if the stellar 1959 is any indication of the quality of these wines back in this epoch, then I really should get my act together and taste more of these older vintages. The 1959 La Pointe is an absolutely superb example of a top-notch vintage of Pomerol at its apogee, soaring from the glass in a complex blaze of dark berries, woodsmoke, summer truffles, leather, signed tobacco, a touch of espresso, superb soil tones and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very complex, with outstanding, tangy acids, excellent focus and superb mid-palate depth. The finish is very long, complex and poised, with little remaining tannin, but outstanding length and grip. This is as fine a vintage of La Pointe as I have ever had the pleasure to taste. 2014-2030+. **92.**

### **1959 Château Trotanoy (Pomerol)**

The last previous bottle of '59 Trotanoy that I tasted was from the Nicolas collection and consequently had been recorked every twenty-five years while it was in their cellars. I have always loved the Nicolas bottlings, but on this particular occasion, it seems that this most recent bottle, with an original cork, was even slightly superior from never having been recorked. The wine offers up great depth and complexity in its stunningly beautiful bouquet of plums, black cherries, cocoa, pomegranate, gamebird, dark soil tones and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very voluptuous in personality, with a great core of fruit,



superb complexity and grip, still a bit of backend tannin and great length on the focused, refined and still sappy finish. This is an old school vintage of Trotanoy, with broad shoulders, bottomless depth and the potential to continue cruising on at this magical summit for many decades to come. It does not have the same sense of refined elegance that one finds at this property starting in the 1961 vintage, but there is an awful lot to love in this more ancient-styled vintage of Trotanoy! 2016-2050. **97.**

#### **1959 Vieux Château Certan**

I have only had the pleasure to taste the '59 VCC on one occasion, but based on this very recent bottling, this has to be amongst my favorite right bank wines in this lovely vintage. The inherent elegance of the property dovetails nicely with the more opulent side of the '59 vintage, and the results are a simply stellar bottle of wine. The superb bouquet offers up a beautifully pure nose of black cherries, dark berries, black truffles, tobacco, gravelly soil tones, espresso and a topnote of nutskins. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant, with a rock solid core of fruit, glorious complexity, very modest remaining tannins and beautiful focus and grip on the very long and intensely flavored finish. A great, great example of the '59 vintage. 2009-2040+. **95.**

#### ***St. Émilion***

*The 1959s that I have tasted from St. Émilion have been really lovely and far above their reputation, and this also applies to older bottles that I had from this commune back in the last decade. 1959 Cheval Blanc is a great wine. I have never had the 1959 Bélair, but based on a stunning recent bottle of the 1961, I have to believe the 1959 is also outstanding and one of the sleepers of the vintage. Similarly, while I have never tasted the 1959 l'Arrosée, the 1961 is a great bottle and so, for the same reasons, I would be on the lookout for the 1959 if it crossed my path. I have only had a single example of the 1959 Figeac, which was sadly corked, but there was once again, a great wine lurking under the TCA and I would expect great things from this wine in this vintage.*

#### **1959 Château Ausone**

The 1959 Ausone is a perfect bottle of wine to my palate and I cannot imagine for the life of me why anyone would want to change a style that has produced such legendary wines in the past. The deep, utterly profound and complex nose soars from the glass in a blaze of roasted plums, sweet nutskins, a touch of blood orange, black cherries, singed tobacco, a bit of candle wax, *sous bois* and coffee tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and impressively tangy (particularly for a '59), with a stunning core of fruit, flawless focus and balance, just a touch of remaining tannin and magical length and grip on the seamless and so stunningly complex finish. This is the greatest vintage of Ausone I have ever had the pleasure to taste and clearly one of the most profound bottles of claret I have ever been fortunate enough to cross paths with. 2009-2060. **100.**

#### **1959 Château Canon**

The 1959 Canon is a great example of this legendary vintage. The bouquet is deep and utterly beautiful, as it delivers a vibrant mélange of cherries, dried red berries, saddle leather, mint, charred wood, a touch of pepper, woodsmoke, a complex base of soil tones and a nice topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep and full-bodied, with a quite powerful profile for a fifty year-old wine, a lovely, plush core of fruit, great focus and balance and

excellent grip on the very long and still mildly tannic finish. Just a classic '59, the Canon should drink beautifully for at least the next forty or fifty years. Great juice. 2009-2050. **94.**



#### **1959 Château la Gaffelière**

The 1959 la Gaffelière is a beautiful bottle of wine at its peak of maturity and is a very clear testimony to the inherent quality of the *terroir* here, which the current owners choose to ignore in their quest to make an over the top, Rolland-esque jam juice version of St. Émilion. The 1959 is a beautiful, old school example of St. Émilion, offering up a deep and very complex nose of black cherries, meaty overtones, coffee, charred wood, a touch of menthol, leather, a bit of paraffin, woodsmoke and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully vigorous, with a fine core of fruit, melting tannins, fine focus and excellent length and grip on the completely *à point* finish. Great juice and one of the true sleepers of the 1959 vintage. 2009-2020+. **90.**

#### **1959 Château Grand Mayne**

The 1959 Grand Mayne is a lovely and fully mature wine that is infinitely more enjoyable than the modern concoctions that the estate is turning out today. The wine offers up a deep and almost meaty bouquet of desiccated cherries and raspberries, singed tobacco, a touch of candle wax, lovely soil tones and a bit of grilled meat. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and silky, with good remaining mid-palate depth, melted tannins, lovely balance and good length and

grip on the complex and fully mature finish. This is a lovely example of the vintage that has been at its peak for decades, but remains sound and tasty. 2009-2020+. **88.**

**1959 Château Magdelaine (served from magnum) Nicolas Bottling**

I have been fortunate the last two times I have drunk the 1959 Magdelaine to have the wine served out of magnum, with this most recent one a Nicolas bottling. In contrast to the last Nicolas 1959 Trotanoy that I tasted (and alluded to above), this magnum is spot on and an absolutely brilliant example of this legendary *terroir*. The deep and complex nose wafts from the glass in a ripe and pure constellation of black cherries, plums, chocolate, nutskin, roasted *pigeon*, a touch of menthol, glorious soil tones and a bit of charred wood in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very velvety in texture, with a plush core of '59 fruit, lovely soil inflection, still a bit of old school tannin and outstanding length and grip on the *à point* and very classy finish. This is a fairly powerful vintage for Magdelaine and an absolute pleasure to drink. 2016-2040. **95.**

**Graves**

*The 1959 Pape-Clément is a great example of the vintage, but I have not tasted it in more than a dozen years, so no note appears below. The wine remains at its apogee I am sure and is well worth the price of admission if one is lucky enough to find a bottle. Similarly, the 1959 Domaine de Chevalier is another outstanding wine that I have not tasted in a long, long time. The 1959 La Tour Haut-Brion is a terrific wine as well and should be drinking beautifully today. Back in this era, there was also a small parcel of vines surrounded by Haut-Brion that was bottled as Le Passion de Haut-Brion and the wine is superb. It is very rare and I have not tasted it for a long, long time, but I am sure that it is still excellent. Haut-Brion eventually bought this parcel from the former proprietors and it was rolled into the First Growth production. The 1959 Smith Haut-Lafitte is also very good, with the plushness of the vintage really working to fine effect here. I last drank a bottle in 2002 and it still had a couple of decades' worth of life in it. Far better than what they are making here today.*

**1959 Château Carbonnieux**

Château Carbonnieux, back in this era, really made some outstanding wines and I have been very fortunate to taste several old vintages from this estate from the '40s and '50s. The 1959 is certainly one of my favorites from the property in this golden age, offering up a very pure and complex nose of plums, black cherries, a touch of blood orange, singed tobacco, chocolate, new leather and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a fine core, still a whisper of backend tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex and velvety finish. A lovely wine. 2009-2025+. **92.**

**1959 Château Haut-Brion**

The 1959 vintage of Haut-Brion was the first legendary bottle of claret that I ever had the pleasure to taste in my career in the wine trade, and I have had the good fortune to taste it with some frequency over the last twenty years. This most recent bottle of '59 Haut-Brion was in pristine condition and every bit as magical as the wine can be when the stars are aligned. As most readers will be aware, this was Jean Delmas' very first vintage in charge of the winemaking at the estate and he obviously hit the ground running! The bouquet is pure, vibrant and bottomless, as it soars from the glass in a blaze of ripe cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, gloriously complex, dark, gravelly soil tones, black truffle, a touch of nutskin and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and brilliantly complex, with

perfect, seamless balance, a sappy core and a very, very long, smoky, roasted and laser-like finish. This has always been a bigger, more powerful vintage of Haut-Brion, but this bottle seems to just be starting to develop more 1953-like elegance to go along with its stunning depth and length. Along with the 1928 and 1953, this is the greatest vintage of Haut-Brion I have ever been lucky enough to taste! 2016-2050. **100.**

#### **1959 Château La Mission Haut-Brion**

The 1959 La Mission is one of the greatest vintages of this wine that I have ever had the pleasure to taste. This most recent bottle, with a mid-shoulder fill, was still showing beautifully at age fifty-one, offering up a sumptuous and pure bouquet of sweet cassis, roasted plums, cigar ash, a beautiful base of dark, gravelly soil tones, black truffles, cigar smoke, leather and a refined base of meatiness. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and a beautiful synthesis of sweet fruit and classic La Mission soil tones, with melting tannins, a plump core and excellent length and grip on the complex and classic finish. With the lower fill level, I would estimate that this example was probably ninety percent of a bottle with more perfect ullage, but still provided plenty of enjoyment to drink. 2010-2040. **92** (with pristine bottles significantly higher and probably pushing the three digit threshold).

#### **Margaux**

*1959 is a superb vintage for Château Margaux, which is not too far off the magical quality of the 1953. I have not drunk a bottle in a long time, but it has always delivered a beautiful synthesis of the plush fruit of the vintage and the inimitable perfume and elegance of this property back in this era. It is one of my favorite post-war vintages of Margaux. I have never had the 1959 Lascombes, but I have drunk several bottles of the 1961 in the last couple of years and it is excellent, so I have to imagine that the 1959 vintage here is also very, very good. Similarly, though I have never tasted the 1959 Cantemerle, I would expect very good things still from this wine, based on how good their wines were in this era.*

#### **1959 Château Malescot-St. Exupery**

The 1959 Château Malescot-St. Exupery is a lovely bottle of fully mature claret, but in this case, I have a fairly sizable preference to the more refined and vigorous 1961 version. The '59 wafts from the glass in a complex and tertiary blend of black cherries, raspberries, woodsmoke, petroleum jelly, a touch of mint, dark soil tones and a bit of fruitcake in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and nicely spicy, with a good core, melted tannins and just a touch of volatile acidity now poking out on the long and focused finish. Good juice, but probably in need of drinking up over the next dozen years or so. Maybe there are better bottles out there? 2012-2025? **89.**

#### **1959 Château Palmer**

I love the 1959 Palmer, which is probably a good step ahead of the very pretty '59 Château Margaux (which I have not drunk in many years, but always enjoyed) and the wine of the commune in this vintage. This most recent bottle was absolutely brilliant, with a slightly more Rubenesque personality than the utterly ethereal '61 Palmer, but with the same bottomless depth, haunting perfume and magical complexity. The bouquet is stunning, soaring from the glass in a blaze of plums, mulberries, black truffles, cigar smoke, a glorious base of soil tones, a touch of nutskin and a pungent topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly suave on the attack, with a plush core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance, refined, melting tannins, impressive grip and a very, very long, very complex and velvety finish. Just a

glorious vintage of Palmer that remains at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability! 2014-2040+. **97.**

### **St. Julien**

*I have always liked the 1959 Leoville Las Cases when I have drunk it in the past, which is in the very good, if not great camp in this vintage. The wine has plenty of plush fruit, good soil signature and when I last drank it, a good, solid structural chassis and I am sure it is still very good today. 1959 Gruaud-Larose is also a very good wine- a bit chunky in personality, but smoky, black fruity and loaded with vigor when last I drank it. I remember being very impressed by the 1959 Leoville-Poyferré once upon a time as well, but it has been a long time now since I last drank a bottle of this wine.*

### **1959 Château Beychevelle**

I have been lucky to cross paths with the '59 Beychevelle with some regularity over the last few years and it is a brilliant wine at its zenith of peak drinkability. The nose is deep, complex and almost Burgundian (ranging from La Tâche-like spice tones to a hint of the beetroot of old Ponsot Clos de la Roche as the wine unfolds) in its aromatic profile, as it jumps from the glass in a beautiful mélange of cherries, raspberries, nutskins, spiced meats, woodsmoke, summer truffles, cigar wrappers, exotic spice tones and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tangy, pure and beautifully complex, with a great core of fruit, melting tannins, exceptional elegance and outstanding length and grip on the soil-driven and utterly refined finish. A great '59, the Beychevelle has years and years of life still ahead of it. 2011-2050. **94.**

### **1959 Château Branaire-Ducru**

The 1959 Château Branaire-Ducru is a good, solid example of the vintage that has no doubt been mature for several decades, but continues to cruise along nicely and remains a very tasty bottle of old claret. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, a touch of plumminess, cigar smoke, dark chocolate and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, plush and still quite solid at the core, with a slightly four-square personality, but still sound structural elements. The finish is long, meltingly tannic and velvety, and though the wine is not as complex as the finest '59s, it is still a very good drink. 2012-2025+. **88.**

### **1959 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou**

While it has been many years since I last tasted the brilliant 1961 Ducru-Beaucaillou, I have been fortunate to taste the equally magical 1959 on a few occasions in the last several years. This is a stunning vintage for this great estate and the wine remains at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability, soaring from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, singed tobacco, a touch of truffle, coffee, gravelly soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure on the attack, with a lovely core of ripe fruit, lovely focus and balance, melting tannins and outstanding length and grip on the quintessentially elegant finish that is the essence of Ducru-Beaucaillou. This is a brilliant wine that is very close in quality to the legendary 1961. 2007-2040+. **96.**

### **1959 Château Talbot**

The 1959 Château Talbot has been fully mature for decades, but continues to cruise along happily along its plateau of maturity and shows no signs whatsoever of starting to fade anytime soon. The wine is very pure and elegant today, offering up a lovely nose of dried berries, a touch of spiced meats, lovely soil tones, sweet cigar ash (if this makes any sense) and a nice touch of

woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, sweet and complex, with a velvety personality, lovely focus and grip, melted tannins and a long, bright and *à point* finish. A lovely wine in its tertiary stage of delicacy and elegance. 2016-2035. **92.**

### ***Pauillac***

*One of my all-time favorite vintages of Lynch-Bages is the 1959, which I have not drunk for close to a decade, but which has always been stellar on the several occasions that I have been lucky enough to share in a bottle. I have little doubt that it remains at its apogee. The 1959 Pichon-Lalande is also excellent- not quite as elegant and perfumed as the brilliant 1961, but very pleasantly plump, truffley and loaded with personality in its own right.*



*Château Lafite-Rothschild , sitting tranquilly on its beautiful grounds on an early spring day in Pauillac.*

### **1959 Château Lafite-Rothschild**

The 1959 Lafite-Rothschild has always been one of my absolutely favorite wines of both this great vintage and the historic estate, and this most recent bottle was every bit as magical as one could hope for from a confluence of great *terroir* and legendary vintage! The bouquet is ripe, pure and bottomless, as it delivers a brilliant constellation of sweet cassis, cigar ash, a touch of mint, very complex, dark soil tones, black truffles, Cuban cigars and a distinctive topnote of fresh sage with a bit of extended aeration. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and almost plush on the attack, with a great core of fruit, impeccable balance, still just a whisper of backend

tannin adding grip and spine and a very, very complex, endless and seamless finish. Amazingly, at nearly sixty years of age, this wine still has decades and decades of life ahead of it and remains at its absolute summit of peak maturity today. This has to be the greatest Médoc in this magical vintage! 2017-2075+. **100.**

### **1959 Château Latour**

It was only a bit of bad luck that allowed us to savor the 1959 Latour at our tasting at Crystal Springs, as a bottle of the 1945 Latour selected for the flight was the victim of an old cork and was not in good condition (and was the last of the '45 vintage in the cellar) and the 1959 was suggested as a replacement. This is a great, great vintage of Latour from an era where the estate was at the absolute top of its game and made one of Bordeaux's best wines year in and year out, with a track record of consistent excellence that no other First Growth could match. Given the longevity of Latour in this era, it is not surprising that the 1959 is still a tad on the young side at age fifty-eight and takes some extended time in decanter to fully blossom, but once it has opened up, its brilliance is very easy to see. The bouquet is complex, ripe and beautiful, offering up scents of black cherries, cassis, sweet cigar wrapper, a very complex base of soil, tobacco smoke and a nice touch of Latour nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful, with a rock solid core of plush fruit, great focus and grip, really impressive acidity for the ripe '59 vintage and a very, very long, complex and utterly soil-driven finish. This is a great, great vintage of Latour that comes very, very close to matching the perfection of the 1961 vintage here! 2017-2100. **99.**

### **1959 Château Mouton-Rothschild**

Along with the 1945 and the 1982 Mouton, the 1959 vintage here remains at the very pinnacle of my tasting experience with this First Growth property. This most recent bottle of the 1959 Mouton was perhaps not the very best I have had and utterly pristine bottles would merit a couple of points higher score, but there is an awful lot to like here, as both the nose and palate are superb. The bouquet delivers a pure, ripe and almost sappy constellation of cassis, black cherries, Cuban cigars, smoky overtones, a touch of petroleum jelly, dark soil tones and a distinct topnote of fresh sage. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a great core of fruit, fine soil signature, suave, melting tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the complex, seamless and very, very long, classy finish. At this age, a wine's quality is determined on a bottle by bottle basis, as fifty-eight years is a long cellaring life, and I am sure that there are bottles out there of the '59 Mouton that have just a touch more punch to them still, but this example was probably at least ninety-five percent of a perfect bottle and was only very, very slightly diminished in its overall impression. The problem was that it was at the same dinner with absolutely pristine bottles of both Lafite and Latour, and so it had to take a backseat to those two legends on this particular evening. Based on previous bottles of the 1959 Mouton, I would add two points to the score here for an absolutely perfect example. 2017-2050. **96.**

### ***Ste. Estèphe***

*The 1959 Calon-Ségur is a stunning example of the vintage and a wine that is very much worth latching onto today, if one comes across a bottle. I cannot recall every drinking the 1959 Cos d'Estournel, but based on the handful of wines I have tasted from this property of late from the decade of the 1960s, I would have pretty high expectations for the 1959 here as well.*



**1959 Château Montrose (served from magnum)**

The 1959 Montrose in magnum is an absolutely magical wine at its zenith of peak drinkability and one of the greatest vintages of Montrose for current consumption. The utterly pure, complex and haunting nose soars from the glass in a refined mélange of cassis, black cherries, sweet cigar tobacco, hints of black truffles, a beautiful base of gravelly soil tones, a very gentle touch of herbs, incipient notes of chipotle peppers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with a silky attack, great mid-palate depth, beautiful soil inflection, bright acids (particularly impressive for a '59) and still a bit of melting tannin perking up the very, very long and stunning finish. The length and grip here are simply profound, and though this is a fairly broad-shouldered wine, I have little doubt that it barely tips 12.5 percent in alcohol and it will continue to cruise along at this celestial level for many, many decades. A great, great vintage of Montrose that is particularly stunning out of magnum. 2011-2075. **96.**

## THE LONG-LIVED AND BEAUTIFUL WHITE WINES OF CAMPANIA



As I alluded to back in my article on Taurasi last summer, the beautiful mountainous region of Campania is also home to some of Italy's finest and longest-lived white wines. The best-known of these are Greco di Tufo and Fiano di Avellino, with the ancient grape of Falanghina having also made a comeback here in recent times and now the third most popular white wine variety in the region. While Campania is plenty warm in the summer months, its higher altitudes and encircling mountains helps to keep temperatures down just a bit more than one might expect for such a southerly Italian locale, but it is really the volcanic soils of the region that provide the spine of acidity in the white wines that allows them to age so long and beautifully. In our era of climactic change, it is pretty rare to find white wines these days that start out life so tightly-knit and relatively inexpressive as do the top white wines of Campania, which harken back to an earlier time and really do require some bottle age to start to blossom and reveal their true identities. I find this is particularly true of the two top white varietals of Greco and Avellino, but this is also the case to a lesser degree with Falanghina, which also needs a bit of bottle age to show its secondary layers of complexity. This youthful reticence is at variance with much of the wine world's impression of Italian white wines, which are seen as lovely middleweights that are flattering from the outset and tend to drink at their best when still in the

bloom of youth. However, this is emphatically not the case with the best white wines of Campania, which in this age of premature oxidation in the realms of white Bordeaux and white Burgundy, must now be numbered amongst the most ageworthy dry white wines of the world.

Today, the “big three” white wines of Campania are clearly Falanghina, Greco di Tufo and Fiano di Avellino, with the resurgent Falanghina probably the most popular of the three wines within Italy itself. On export markets, Greco di Tufo is the best-known and has had the longest presence, as I can still recall very well the widespread availability of Mastroberardino’s Greco di Tufo in the US market when I was getting started in the wine trade in the early 1980s (in fact, it was the only white wine from Campania that I stocked in my early merchant days). While I enjoy all of these wines very much from top producers, it is my opinion that the most complex and complete wine at its apogee of the three major white wine varieties is Fiano di Avellino, despite it being a bit less well-known outside of Campania than Greco di Tufo. The principal reason that I would rank Fiano slightly ahead of Greco and Falanghina is that at its peak of maturity, eight or ten years out from the vintage, Fiano is simply a bit more complex wine than Greco (I do not have the same experience with aged examples of Falanghina as I do with the other two grapes, but my impression at this time is that it is a bit less long-lived than either Greco or Fiano), though both Fiano and Greco have similarly long and fruitful evolutions in bottle. Within Campania itself, as well amongst the various wine journalists who specialize in Italian wines and who I quizzed about their preferred white wine while I was in the region last spring, well-aged Greco di Tufo seems to have a slightly larger following than Fiano di Avellino, but it was a close race and one can easily say that each grape variety has its loyal fans who would nominate it as Campania’s finest white wine.

Within the region of Campania, Greco di Tufo and Fiano di Avellino tend to be planted on quite different soil types, with Fiano usually going into parcels that have more clay in the soil, while Greco is reserved for *tuffeau* soils. Of course, this being Campania and nearby Mount Etna always playing a major role in defining local *terroirs*, there is a vein of volcanic soil in both vineyard types that serves to give the wines their fine chassis of acidity and their serious potential for long evolution in bottle. While I would peg both wines peak of maturity around the ten year mark, this is certainly not the point where the two varieties start to decline and on my trip to the region last spring, I had the pleasure to drink examples back into the 1970s that were still cruising along just fine in bottle and showed no imminent threat of decline, so it is very easy to see that we are speaking of seriously long-lived dry white wines in the case of both Greco di Tufo and Fiano di Avellino. Structurally, these two wines in their youth remind me quite a bit of classically styled white Bordeaux, as they tend to be relatively tight-knit and inexpressive on both the nose and palate when first bottled and take at least a few years to really start to stir and show their inherent complexity.

While there are several other white grape varieties that are planted widely throughout Campania, including Bianca Zita, Biancolella, Pallagrello Bianco and Coda di Volpe, to name just a few, I have primarily focused this report on the three most widely planted and popular varieties for white wines in Campania- Falanghina, Greco and Fiano. Part of this is due to the fact that during my visit to Campania last spring, it was these three white wine varieties that I focused on primarily during my tastings, but the other reason that these three grapes take up most of the coverage below is that they are the top three white wines in the region today and I imagine

that most readers will be especially interested in the top whites of Campania, if they are feeling intrepid enough to dip their toes in the water here. Several producers are starting to experiment with blended cuvées of white wines, despite the fact that traditionally (remember this is still Campania and when we talk of tradition, we are really only going back to the early 1990s in most cases, excluding the trailblazing estate of Mastroberardino) each grape has been bottled as a mono-varietal. I liked several of the top blended whites that I tasted here during my trip last spring, but do not have any sense of how well the blended cuvées will age in comparison to Fiano or Greco bottled on its own, as none of the older whites that I have drunk from Campania have been blends. But, there is no reason to assume that they will not also age quite gracefully, and it will be interesting to see how they evolve with extended time in the cellar.

Of recent vintages in the region for white wines, 2015 was marked by a rainy *fin de saison* in the month of September and it will not likely go down as one of the top years in Campania for white wines, though they are likely to drink very well from early on in their lives in bottle. Fiano was probably the most favored white grape in 2015, as it ripens a bit later and was able to stay out on the vines after the rain and dry out for a couple of weeks, allowing for a bit more structural sophistication in the finished wines, whereas other wines are a bit more wide open and laid back in terms of structure in this vintage. The 2014 vintage here was difficult, as early and mid-summer rains were far heavier than normal (this was the case throughout Italy), but Campania had a better second half of the growing season and the white wines have turned out pretty well. Ripeness is not optimal in the 2014 whites, but the wines are fresh and zesty and really not bad at all as a group. The 2013 vintage had difficulty during the flowering period, when cool and rainy weather disrupted the *floraison* and yields are not ideal as a result, but the white wines are again quite good and precise in Campania, with sound underlying acids and the potential for at least mid-term cellaring. The 2012 vintage is a very short crop, as spring frosts severely cut back potential yields, but the remainder of the growing season was ideal and the wines are really excellent. 2011 was a very good year that was marred by a couple of weeks of very high temperatures in late August, which sent sugar levels soaring and could cause “roasted tones” in wines that were made from grapes picked too late. However, I have very much liked the white Campanian wines that I have tasted from 2011, but it is a relatively small sampling. 2010 was a warm summer and produced a good-sized crop of ripe grapes and quite classic wines. Ilaria Petitto of Donnachiara describes 2009 as a “cool year” for white wines in the region and I very much enjoyed her 2009 Fiano the last time I tasted it. 2008 was also a cooler year, but the wines have aged very nicely and are quite classic in profile. 2007 was a hot growing season in Campania, but the couple of ’07 whites that I have tried have aged beautifully and are drinking with great style today.

The following wines are listed first by varietal, with Falanghina, followed by Greco di Tufo, Fiano di Avellino and finally blends and more esoteric grapes. Within each subsection, the wines are list chronologically and then alphabetically by producer.

### ***Falanghina***

#### **2015 Falanghina- Donnachiara**

The 2015 Falanghina from Donnachiara had just been bottled a couple of weeks prior to my visit to the region last spring, and was still just a touch unsettled from its *mise*. The bouquet is very pretty, offering up a youthful blend of tart pear, a touch of green olive, salty soil tones

and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely plush on the attack, with a good core, bright acids and fine length and grip on the youthful finish. There is no signs of *fluidité* here from the September rains and this wine has classic depth and intensity of flavor. 2016-2025. **90+**.

**2015 Falanghina del Sannio- Mastroberardino**

The 2015 Falanghina del Sannio from Mastroberardino in nicely low octane, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol and cut in a very refined style. The fairly floral bouquet offers up a fine constellation of pear, casaba melon, salty soil tones, hints of the citrus zest to come and a potpourri of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite impressively endowed at the core, with good framing acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex finish that closes with a fine touch of olive. I imagine that this would have even better cut in a more classic vintage, but this is a very successful 2015! 2017-2025. **91**.

**2015 Falanghina- Mustilli (natural cork)**

Mustilli was one of the earliest small producers to start to bottle a significant percentage of their production on their own in Campania, as their first vintage sold in bottle was back in 1976. Today the winery is run by two sisters, Annachiara and Paula, who took over for their father early in the new millennium. Signor Mustilli is credited with resurrecting and championing the Falanghina grape back in the 1970s, which was almost extinct at that time. The sisters' 2015 Falanghina was bottled under both screwcap and natural cork, but this note is taken from the natural cork bottling, which was significantly superior to the screwcapped version when the two were tasted side by side. The bouquet is a youthful blend of pear, spring flowers, salty soil and a nice touch of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still primary, with lovely roundness on the attack, a fine core and a long, zesty and well-balanced finish. Mustilli is recognized as one of the very top producers of this grape in Campania and it is easy to see why! 2016-2035. **92**.

**2002 Falanghina- Mustilli**

This beautiful bottle of older Falanghina underscores that it is not just Fiano and Greco that have the potential for longevity in bottle in the realm of white wines in Campania, as this wine is still drinking with plenty of style at age fourteen. The bouquet is deep and really lovely, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of candied lemon, beeswax, sea salts, fresh apricot, citrus peel and a gentle touch of wet wool in the upper register that really recalls maturing chenin blanc. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and still fresh as a daisy, with a fine core, excellent soil signature and a long, vibrant and classy finish. This still has years of life ahead of it! 2016-2025. **93**.

***Greco di Tufo***

**2015 Greco di Tufo- Donnachiara**

The 2015 Greco di Tufo from Donnachiara was still in tank in the spring of 2016, but was showing very fine potential. The bouquet is a bit more reticent out of the blocks than the lovely 2015 Fiano, offering up scents of green fruit, tart pear, a touch of lemongrass, white soil tones, dried flowers and incipient notes of beeswax. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly powerful in style, with an excellent core, a fine touch of puppy fat on the attack and very good length and grip on the still decidedly youthful finish. 2018-2030+. **92+**.

**2015 Greco di Tufo “Cutizzi”- Feudi di San Gregorio**

The Cutizzi cuvée of Greco from Feudi di San Gregorio is fermented and raised in stainless steel, with frequent *battonage* practiced on the wine for four or five months of its

*elevage*. The wine is lovely on both the nose and palate, albeit still quite youthful, as it delivers a fine aromatic mix of green olive, tart pear, lovely minerality, straw, a fair bit of smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full, fresh and shows good nascent complexity, with a fine core, vibrant acids and a long, focused and very promising finish. This quite tasty out of the blocks, but will be even better with a bit of time in the cellar. 2016-2030+. **91+**.



#### **2015 Greco di Tufo “Nova Serra”- Mastroberardino**

Mastroberardino’s 2015 Greco di Tufo “Nova Serra” is an excellent young wine, delivering impressive depth and precision in its bouquet of lime zest, white peach, complex minerality, wild fennel, a touch of *fleur de sel* and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and primary, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, sound framing acids and impressive length and mineral drive on the well-balanced finish. The late season rains of 2015 seem to have taken a bit of acidity away here, but have not compromised the mid-palate depth one iota! This should age very nicely for at least a dozen years and maybe longer, and is already very easy to drink. 2017-2030. **92**.

#### **2015 Greco di Tufo- Mustilli**

In addition to making the top examples of Falanghina, the Mustilli sisters also produce a fine example of Greco di Tufo. Their 2015 offers up a fine young nose of pear, apple, plenty of Greco smokiness, salty soil tones and a gentle topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine

is deep, full and zesty, with a still quite primary personality, plenty of mid-palate concentration, lovely soil signature and a long, vibrant and perfectly balanced young finish. All this needs is time. 2018-2035. **91+**.

**2015 Greco Giano “Sannio Taburno”- Ocone**

This bottling of Greco hails from outside of the DOCG limits for Greco di Tufo, hence the Greco Giano designation. The wine is quite good, offering up a ripe and satisfying bouquet of pineapple, apple, smoky overtones and lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with good acidity and grip, a fine core and a long, zesty and youthful finish. This needs a bit of bottle age to blossom properly, but it will be a tasty bottle in a slightly riper style. 2018-2030. **89+**.

**2015 Greco di Tufo- Sanpaolo**

The 2015 Greco di Tufo from Sanpaolo is a fine bottle in the making, but this is more classically structured than many of the more forward 2015s and consequently, will need a bit of bottle age to start to drink with generosity. The youthful nose wafts from the glass in a smoky blend of pink grapefruit, salty soil tones, tart pear and orange peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and shows fine nascent complexity, with a rock solid core, zesty acids and impressive length and grip on the youthful finish. Give it a couple of years to start to stir. 2018-2025+. **89+**.

**2015 Greco di Tufo- Terre d’Aione**

Terre d’Aione has fairly old vines by the standards of Campania, as their higher elevation vineyards average forty years of age. The winery’s Greco is fermented and aged in stainless steel, and the 2015 was one of the top examples I tasted from the vintage. The excellent and complex nose jumps from the glass in a bright blend of pear, lime, incipient notes of beeswax, plenty of smokiness, straw and salty minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely tensile, with a more primary personality than the nose suggests, a fine core and impressive focus and grip on the long and vibrant finish. A very impressive 2015! 2018-2035+. **93**.

**2015 Greco di Tufo- Torricino**

I do not know any of the background information on Torricino, but their 2015 Greco di Tufo showed beautifully at our blind tasting in Campania last spring. The wine is absolutely rock solid on the palate, with impressive depth, cut and grip and shows no signs of the autumn rains that plagued so many other growers in the region. The bouquet is classic, delivering a fine, smoky constellation of pear, green olive, a touch of fresh herbs, citrus peel and soil. On the palate the wine is full, crisp and very impressive at the core, with bright acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, classy finish. 2016-2030+. **91+**.

**2015 Greco di Tufo- Vesevo**

The 2015 Greco di Tufo from Vesevo (the winery takes its name from the name of Mount Vesuvius in the local dialect) is really a fine example of this vintage, with the late season rains perhaps giving the wine a bit more of a laid back structure, but with still the depth and complexity to give the wine plenty of merit for earlier drinking. The bouquet offers up a wide open blend of pear, dried flowers, hints of olive, lime peel, gentle smokiness and those lovely, salty soil tones of Irpinia. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and nicely light on its feet for young Greco, with a very good focus and grip, a respectable core and a long, nicely balanced finish. This has turned out very well. 2016-2023. **90**.

**2015 Greco di Tufo- Vigne Guadagno**

The 2015 Greco di Tufo from Vigne Guadagno is a very nice example of the vintage, with a ripe and forward personality that allows for fine drinking right out of the gate. The



bouquet offers up a complex mix of tar pear, lemongrass, plenty of smokiness, salty soil tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, sound framing acids and a long, youthful and promising finish. This will develop more complexity with bottle age, but do to the softer structure here, it will probably have a fairly small window of peak drinkability. Nevertheless, during its plateau it will be a very tasty drink. 2017-2025+. **90.**

#### **2014 Greco di Tufo “Vigna Cicogna”- Benito Ferrara**

Gabriella Ferrara now runs this family domaine, which is located at the upper elevations of the zone, with her vineyards lying between four hundred and fifty and six hundred meters above sea level. The 2014 Greco di Tufo “Vigna Cicogna” from Gabriella is starting to show some evolution on the nose and palate, but remains fresh and vibrant, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, wet stone minerality, fresh herb tones, lemongrass and plenty of Greco smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is complex, focused and full-bodied, with good cut and grip, lovely backend mineral drive and a long, well-balanced and zesty finish. Good juice. 2016-2025. **91.**

#### **2014 Greco di Tufo- Feudi di San Gregorio**

The 2014 Greco *Normale* from Feudi di San Gregorio is drinking okay, but the wine is fairly evolved and not particularly long on the palate- though this was a fairly difficult vintage and the wine is not bad in the context of a rather challenging year. The deeper-pitched bouquet is clean and wide open, delivering scents of fresh apricot, orange zest, a good base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and complex, with gentle acids, solid grip and a rather clipped finish. This is okay, but no better and rather a surprisingly modest wine by the high standards of Feudi di San Gregorio. 2016-2020. **86.**

#### **2014 Greco di Tufo “Cutizzi” - Feudi di San Gregorio**

In contrast to the straight 2014 Greco, the Cutizzi bottling from Feudi is excellent. The bouquet delivers a fine, smoky blend of green olive, pear, a refined base of salty soil tones, lemongrass and what seems like a discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full and focused, with a lovely core, bright acids and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. Fine juice and much more in line with what one would expect from this outstanding producer. 2016-2025. **92.**

#### **2014 Greco di Tufo- Fonzone**

Fonzone was only founded in 2005 by Lorenzo Fonzone Caccese, with the winery and vineyards located in the higher elevations of the village of Paternopoli (which also is home to Taurasi *maestro* Luigi Tecce). *Signor* Fonzone did not plant his Greco vineyards until 1994 and the first commercial release of this varietal by the winery was in the 2011 vintage. The 2014 Greco was showing quite nicely at the time of my visit, offering up a maturing nose of pear, lime, wet stone minerality, straw and an overtly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with an almost Chablis-like personality, a superb core of fruit, impressive cut and grip and a very long, precise finish. This is extremely impressive juice! 2016-2025+. **93+.**

#### **2013 Greco “Vallicelli”- Colli di Castelfranci (Irpinia)**

The Greco “Vallicelli” from Colli di Castelfranci lies outside of the Greco di Tufo DOCG, hence its labeling as a wine from Irpinia. The 2013 version is quite good, offering up a lovely bouquet of pear, fresh lemon, a touch of beeswax, good soil tones and a topnote of citrus

peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and zesty, with good, but not great depth at the core, nice backend minerality and a long, vibrant finish. This is good juice. 2016-2025. **89+**.

**2013 Greco “Contrada Bussi” Studi- Feudi di San Gregorio**

The Greco Studi bottling from the Contrada Bussi (a vineyard planted on a blend of clay and *tuffeau*) was first produced in the 2013 vintage. This is more expressive today than the 2013 Fiano from Contrada Arianiello (see below), offering up a vibrant and complex nose of green apple, fresh lime, classic Greco smokiness, a fine base of soil tones, gentle botanicals and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and very elegant in profile, with a rock solid core, fine mineral drive and a very long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is high class Greco. 2016-2025+. **92**.

**2011 Greco di Tufo “Ostinato”- Donnachiara (500 ml.)**

This is a late-harvest bottling of Greco that Ilaria Petitto only produced in the 2011 vintage. It is bone dry in style, though it shows some exotic notes from its late harvest, as it wafts from the glass in a complex blend of fresh apricot, a touch of beeswax, orange peel, a lovely layer of spice tones and a superb base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, fresh and drinking with plenty of style today, with fine focus and grip, bright acids and a long, complex and zesty finish. Unlike its Fiano twin, Esoterico (please see below), the 2011 Ostinato is already into its plateau of peak maturity and is drinking with great generosity and bounce. 2016-2030+. **93**.

**1977 Greco di Santacroce- Mustilli**

This was one of the very first vintages from Signor Mustilli and the Greco from this year continues to cruise along beautifully and fully shows just how long-lived the white wines of Campania can be when cellared. The bouquet is deep, complex and smoky, delivering a fine mélange of pear, lemon peel, a touch of beeswax, lovely soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still plenty fresh, with a fine core, superb balance and grip and a long, complex and *à point* finish. As I mentioned in the introduction, this fine old Greco is not the most complex bottle of mature white wine out there, but it has aged very gracefully and is still vibrant and classy. 2016-2030. **90**.

***Fiano di Avellino***

**2015 Fiano di Avellino- Donnachiara**

The 2015 Fiano di Avellino from Ilaria Petitto was still in tank during my spring of 2016 visit to the winery, and was showing lovely potential. This variety is always harvested a couple of weeks later than the Falanghina here and benefited from a bit more distance after the rainy weather of September and was showing classic balance and depth as a result. The excellent nose jumps from the glass in a mix of tart pear, lemon zest, hints of the green olive to come, salty soil tones, a bit of beeswax and gently musky floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and nicely reserved in profile, with an excellent core, fine bounce and grip and a very long, youthful and promising finish. This will be a fine, fine bottle with a bit of bottle age. 2018-2030+. **92+**.

**2015 Fiano di Avellino “Pietramara”- I Favati**

The 2015 Fiano di Avellino “Pietramara” from I Favati is made in a slightly reductive style which demands a bit of aeration to blossom, but probably also augurs well for its long-term evolution in bottle. The bouquet offers up a smoky blend of yellow fruit, salty soil tones, a bit of

petrol and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full, focused and nicely balanced, with a good core, bright acids and impressive backend mineral drive on the long and still fairly primary finish. This is well-made and should blossom nicely with a bit more bottle age. 2017-2035. **89+**.

**2015 Fiano di Avellino “Radici”- Mastroberardino**

The 2015 Fiano di Avellino “Radici” from Mastroberardino is excellent and shows the benefit that this variety accrued in 2015, as its later-ripening personality allowed for a recovery from the rainy period. The bouquet is deep, complex and vibrant, jumping from the glass in a mix of pear, tangerine, complex minerality, dried flowers, just a hint of the beeswax that will arrive with bottle age and a nice touch of lime zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full and crisp, with a fine core of fruit, excellent focus and grip, snappy acids and outstanding backend mineral drive on the long and still youthful finish. I would guess that this vintage of Fiano was harvested a bit later than typical at Mastroberardino, to allow the vines to work out the water from the earlier rain, and this has given the wine a fairly powerful profile that augurs very well for its long-term aging potential. 2017-2035. **92+**.

**2015 Fiano “Helios”- La Pampa**

La Pampa lies outside of the DO of Fiano di Avellino, and their 2015 example of Fiano is a bit more broad-shouldered than the examples from the region outside of Avellino, but it is also very well-made. The bouquet is a ripe and classy blend of lime, pear, gentle botanicals, good underlying minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and has good mid-palate depth, with bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Fine juice. 2016-2030. **90**.

**2015 Fiano di Avellino- Sanpaolo**

The 2015 Fiano di Avellino from Sanpaolo is a good young wine in the making. The bouquet is still quite primary, wafting from the glass in a mix of lime, tart pear, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and nicely mineral on the backend, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a nascently complex finish. This has good stuffing, but not perhaps quite the lift and verve of a top example of the vintage such as Donnachiara. 2016-2025+. **89**.

**2014 Fiano di Avellino “Pietracalda”- Feudi di San Gregorio**

The Pietracalda bottling of Fiano from Feudi di San Gregorio is handled with the same methodology as the Cutizzi Greco- fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel with four to five months of *battonage* practiced. The 2014 version is quite good, offering up a classic bouquet of green apple, salty minerality, spring flowers and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a wide open attack, good focus and grip and solid framing acids to carry the wine nicely through the mid-term, but not the customary girdle of acidity to allow the wine to age more than six or seven years. 2016-2023. **89**.

**2014 Fiano “Pian di Stio”- San Salvatore (served from magnum)**

San Salvatore is a mixed agricultural farm, producing wine, olives, fruits and vegetables, as well as its own Buffalo Mozzarella. They are located outside of the Fiano di Avellino DO, in the Paestrum IGT region and they farm their vineyards organically. The 2014 Fiano “Pian di Stio” is excellent offering up a bright and complex nose of green olive, apple, incipient notes of beeswax, salty soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a fine core and soil signature, bright acids and a long, elegant and

impressively complex finish. 2014 is not an easy vintage and this wine has turned out dramatically well. 2016-2025+. **92.**

### **2013 Fiano di Avellino- Antico Costello**

The 2013 Fiano di Avellino from Antico Costello is a good, solid example of the vintage, but this house is primarily a Taurasi specialist and their Fiano is not quite in the same league as their excellent examples of Taurasi (though one does have to remember that the estate only began producing white wines in the 2011 vintage). The wine offers up a nose of pear, lemon, salty soil tones, beeswax and a nice floral topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and nicely balanced, with bright acids, moderate complexity, but sneaky length and grip on the zesty finish. A very pleasant example that augurs very nicely for future white wines here. 2016-2025.

**89.**

### **2013 Fiano di Avellino- Donnachiara**

The 2013 Fiano from Donnachiara is starting to blossom nicely, offering up a bright nose of pear, green olive, salty soil tones, lemon peel and a topnote of anise. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with a fine core, good soil signature and impressive grip on the long and very nicely balanced finish. This is still a few years away from its peak, but it is opening very well and starting to drink with style and grace. 2016-2030+. **91+.**



*Slick packaging and really high quality white wines define the range at Feudi di San Gregorio.*

### **2013 Fiano “Contrada Arianiello” Studi- Feudi di San Gregorio**

The “Studi” bottlings debuted from Feudi di San Gregorio in the 2012 vintage. These are single vineyard bottlings produced in very limited quantities to highlight both their varietal and the *terroir* of the vineyard from which they are selected. The Contrada Arianiello was one of the pioneer bottlings in 2012, and the 2013 is a very good example of Fiano, offering up a youthful bouquet of pear, green olive, smoky herb tones, salty minerality and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and still quite primary in profile, with a good core, fine cut and grip and a long, still tight finish. This is a bit youthfully green still and could use a bit of bottle age to relax structurally, but it will be quite good. 2018-2025. **90.**

### **2013 Fiano di Avellino- I Gaudi**

This small winery farms four hectares of vines, all of which are committed to Fiano and they only produce a single bottling of this varietal, which is fermented and aged in stainless steel, with an extended period of fine lees contact (but no *battonage*). The 2013 Fiano di Avellino from I Gaudi is excellent and drinking very well indeed right now, wafting from the glass in a mix of tart pear, salty soil tones, a touch of lemongrass, gentle smokiness and a topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with crisp acids, fine focus and grip and a long, intensely flavored finish. This is a slightly more powerful style of Fiano than many of its neighbors, but it is very well done in this style and the wine is drinking with plenty of style now and will easily keep another dozen years or more. Lovely juice. 2016-2030. **91.**

### **2013 Fiano di Avellino- Cantina Riccio**

The 2013 Cantina Riccio Fiano is a bit softer than most of these other 2013s, but despite its relatively gentle acidity, there is sufficient depth and complexity here to really catch one’s attention. The fine bouquet offers up notes of green olive, salty minerality, gentle grassiness, tart orange, smoke and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and gently herbaceous, with a fine core, lovely balance and superb backend length and grip. The acids here still frame the wine nicely, and though this will be a relatively short-lived example of Fiano, it is complex and classy and really a triumph, given the challenges of this vintage. 2016-2025. **90.**

### **2013 Fiano di Avellino “Contrada Sant’Aniello”- Vigne Guadagno**

The 2013 Fiano “Contrada Sant’Aniello” from Vigne Guadagno is a tad on the soft side on the palate, but offers up fine aromatic and flavor complexity and for near-term drinking provides plenty of enjoyment. The bouquet is a blend of tart pear, lime peel, gentle grassy tones, a touch of smokiness and a good, underlying base of salty soil nuances. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and deep at the core, with impressive complexity and grip, gentle, framing acids and a long, poised finish. This will need drinking sooner, rather than later, but it is a well-made wine. 2016-2020. **89+.**

### **2013 Fiano di Avellino “Alimata”- Villa Raiano**

The 2013 Fiano di Avellino “Alimata” from Villa Raiano has seen some new oak, which has been done in a very slightly heavy-handed style, but underneath the oaky veneer is a wine of admirable depth and complexity. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of pear, green olive, salty minerality, dried flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, but also slightly dominated by its new wood today. The finish is long, with bright, zesty acids, lovely mineral drive and impressive grip, so the real question is how these superb raw materials will eventually absorb their new wood component. Today the wine is slightly over-oaked, but maybe time will heal this a bit? 2016-2025+. **88+?**

### **2012 Fiano di Avellino “Pietracalda”- Feudi di San Gregorio**

The 2012 vintage of Pietracalda from Feudi di San Gregorio is really drinking well today, offering up a complex and elegant nose of pear, lime blossoms, salty soil tones, beeswax and a touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very elegant in profile, with a fine core, zesty acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and light on its feet finish. The low yields of 2012 have really given this wine impressive intensity of flavor. This is very sophisticated winemaking! 2016-2030+. **92.**

### **2011 Fiano di Avellino- Donnachiara**

I really like the precision and racy cut of the 2011 Donnachiara Fiano, as this is a slightly cooler year in Campania and the wine has retained a nicely lean profile as it has matured. The bouquet is bright and generous, wafting from the glass in a mix of lemon, melon, beautiful minerality, beeswax, a discreet touch of licorice and a nice touch of salinity in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly tight structurally, with a good core, fine cut and focus and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is starting to really drink at its apogee, but with plenty of reserves to carry it far into the future. 2016-2035+. **92.**

### **2011 Fiano di Avellino “Esoterico”- Donnachiara (500 ml.)**

The Esoterico bottling of Fiano from Ilaria Petitto was an experimental wine that has turned out beautifully, but which she has found the market hard to warm up to, despite its excellent quality. Perhaps this is because the wine was only bottled in half liter bottles, so that clients expect the wine to be a dessert wine? In any case, the wine is really superb, as it was half barrel-fermented and produced from fruit that was harvested in mid-November of this year, after a sleet storm had partially frozen the berries. The wine is quite dry in style and really superb, offering up a complex bouquet of pear, lime peel, a fine base of salty soil tones, a touch of green olive, balsam boughs and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary in profile at age five, with a fine core, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the nascently complex and very long finish. A superb Fiano. 2018-2035. **93+.**

### **2011 Fiano di Avellino- Tenuta Sarno 1860**

Tenuta Sarno 1860 is another winery that only produced Fiano, and based on this superb 2011, they are one of the specialists in the region with this varietal. Their 2011 Fiano di Avellino has started to develop lovely secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a fine blend of candied lemon peel, salty minerality, dried flowers, salty minerality and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and *à point*, with zesty acids, fine grip and a long, focused and complex finish. This is a classic bottle of Fiano at its apogee, but still with plenty of years ahead of it. 2016-2025+. **92.**

### **2009 Fiano di Avellino- Donnachiara**

2009 was a cool vintage in Campania for the white wines and this has allowed the '09 Fiano from Donnachiara to age very gracefully. At age seven, it is drinking splendidly, offering up a bright and complex nose of lemon, pear, a gentle hint of olive, lovely waxiness, anise, a fine base of soil tones and a delicate touch of fresh tarragon in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite round on the attack, with a rock solid core, fine soil signature, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and focused finish. This is fresh as a daisy and at its apogee right now, with a gentle closing note of bitterness on the backend that works beautifully at the table. A beautiful example of mature Fiano. 2016-2025+. **93.**

### **2007 Fiano di Avellino- Donnachiara**

The 2007 Fiano di Avellino from Donnachiara is a bit riper in profile than the excellent 2009, but every bit as refined and classy. The bouquet jumps from the glass in an expressive blend of candied lemon, salty soil tones, a hint of botanicals, notes of beeswax and a lovely floral topnote that is gently redolent of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and bottomless at the core, with bright, zesty acids, excellent cut and grip and a very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This wine is at its apogee, but it still has a decade or more of life ahead of it. Dynamite Fiano! 2016-2025+. **94.**

### **2006 Fiano di Avellino- di Méo**

The winemaking team at di Méo raises their Fiano di Avellino bottling in older, French oak *tonneaux*, rather than stainless steel, and though the wine is raised in older wood, it still shows just a touch oak influence at ten years of age. The 2006 Fiano delivers a stylish, nicely mature bouquet of pear, lemon, a touch of olive, beeswax, a dollop of acacia blossoms, salty soil tones and a very discreet base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and solid at the core, with still good acidity for a ten year-old Fiano, but without the mineral drive that one finds so often in this varietal. This is a very good wine at age ten, with good length on the backend, if perhaps not quite the same grip it would have had if raised in stainless. 2016-2023. **88.**

### ***Other White Wine Varietals and Blends***

#### **2015 Grecomusc- Contrade di Taurasi**

Grecomusc is the local name for the Rovello Bianco grape, which is very rare in Campania these days. Contrade di Taurasi makes the only example I have ever tasted of this varietal, which they ferment and raise in stainless steel and hold back for a year in the cellar after bottling before its release. The 2015 is very pretty, offering up a musky bouquet of peach, pear, a touch of wild fennel, pungent floral tones and a bit of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and shows off good depth at the core, with sound framing acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. I do not get the sense that this wine will age along the lines of Fiano or Greco, but it is a tasty wine for drinking over the next few years. 2017-2020. **89.**

#### **2015 Coda di Volpe- Donnachiara**

The Coda di Volpe is produced from rented vineyards in the town of Benevento, which Ilaria Petitto first started producing in the 2011 vintage. The 2015 is quite pretty and stylish, offering up a very floral bouquet of melon, pear, a touch of citrus peel, a nice base of white soil tones and plenty of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and shows nice framing acidity, with a good core and a long, wide open and nicely ripe finish. With the late season rains in 2015, I am sure that this wine is a bit more forward in personality than in a classic year, for unlike the Fiano in this vintage, the Coda di Volpe was ready for picking when the rains arrived and could not be left out on the vines. A very good result for the vintage. 2016-2020. **89.**

#### **2015 Biancolella d'Ischia- Feudi di San Gregorio**

The 2015 Biancolella from Feudi di San Gregorio is really a pretty wine. This bottling is one of the few at Feudi di San Gregorio that sees no new wood, as it is raised entirely in stainless steel. The bouquet offers up a bright blend of fresh lime, ocean breeze, dried flowers, lovely minerality and a bit of lime blossom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and



crisp, with a lovely core, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the complex and well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2016-2020+. **91+**.



*Relatively younger vines, with fruit and nut trees behind, in the wilds of Campania.*

#### **2015 Ravello Bianco- Ettore Sammarco**

The Ravello Bianco bottling from Ettore Sammarco is a blend of eighty percent Bianca Zita and twenty percent Falanghina, with the wine fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel. The 2015 is quite good, wafting from the glass in a blend of white peach, lemon blossoms, a fine base of soil and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is zesty, full and already nicely complex, with a fine core, snappy acids and very good grip on the long and complex finish. This is a very tasty bottle for drinking over the next handful of years, but I cannot imagine it will have the same potential longevity of a Fiano or a Greco. 2016-2020. **90**.

#### **2015 Lacryma Christi del Vesuvio- Mastroberardino**

The 2015 Lacryma Christi del Vesuvio from Mastroberardino is a fine, fine bottle in the making. The bouquet is still youthfully primary, but also deep and promising, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, a touch of green olive, volcanic soil tones, a touch of lanolin and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and very nicely balanced, with good acids, fine focus and grip, plenty of depth at the core and very good length on the still youthful finish. This will develop more complexity as it has time to evolve in bottle, but it is already pretty tasty in its youth. 2017-2030. **90+**.

**2015 Calù “Terre del Volturno”- Sclavia**

This is made from a grape called Pallagrello Bianco. The wine offers up a lovely nose of pear, apple, a nice touch of green olive, acacia blossoms and a gentle base of white soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plump with ripe fruit, with bright acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Very pleasant. 2016-2019. **90.**

**2014 Furore Bianco “Fiorduva”- Cantine Marisa Cuomo (Costa d’Amalfi)**

I had an appointment to visit and taste with Marisa Cuomo, but a car accident on the only road into the winery blocked access and I was not able to taste in the cellars during my trip to Campania. Happily, I did have a chance to try her lovely Fiorduva, which is a blend of the local grapes of Fenile, Ginestra and Ripoli. The 2014 Fiorduva was excellent, delivering a fine aromatic constellation of white peach, pear, ocean breeze, spring flowers, a bit of butter and a topnote of green olive. On the palate the wine is deep, crisp and complex, with a full format, lovely focus and grip and a pure, complex and zesty finish. This is really well-made. 2016-2020+. **93.**

**2014 Campanaro- Feudi di San Gregorio**

The Campanaro from Feudi di San Gregorio is composed of a blend of forty percent Greco and sixty percent Fiano, with only ten percent of the Greco portion barrel-fermented and the remainder of the cuvée fermented and aged in stainless steel. The 2014 Campanaro offers up a deep and classy bouquet of pear, green apple, spring flowers, chalky soil tones, a nice touch of green olive and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with fine focus and grip, snappy acids and excellent balance on the bouncy finish. Fine juice that should age very well indeed. 2016-2030+. **93.**

**2014 Pallagrello Bianco “le Sèrole”- Terre del Principe**

The Pallagrello Bianco “le Sèrole” bottling from Terre del Principe is barrel-fermented and then racked into stainless steel tanks for aging for eight months prior to bottling. The 2014 offers up a lovely nose of pear,. Green olive, a nice base of white soil tones, dried flowers and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and wide open in personality, with a good core, bright acids and very good length and grip on the stylish finish. This is quite tasty now, but probably will not make old bones. 2016-2020. **89.**

**2012 Pallagrello Bianco “le Sèrole”- Terre del Principe**

The 2012 vintage is a step up from 2014 and the le Sèrole from Terre del Principe is really fine in this year. The bouquet is bright, complex and loaded with personality, wafting from the glass in a mix of peach, pear, a touch of honeycomb, salty soil tones and a nice dollop of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and crisp, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and zesty finish. Despite this being two years older than the 2014, this has the superior structure to carry it into the future and should last a few years longer. It has now reached a very nice level of secondary aromas and flavors and is drinking beautifully. Fine juice. 2016-2023. **92.**

**CLOS DES BILLARDS  
GREATNESS IN THE COMMUNE OF SAINT-AMOUR**



I have been a fan of the beautiful and long-lived wines of Domaine des Billards in Saint-Amour now for many years, as I find their long-lived and beautifully pure wines to be amongst my very favorites in the Beaujolais region. When most people think of Cru Beaujolais for the cellar, the two immediate appellations that come to mind are Morgon and Moulin-à-Vent, which have traditionally been the two Crus that commentators have turned to for wines from this region that can stand the test of time, and indeed, the very oldest bottles of Cru Beaujolais that I have ever tasted (from 1945 and 1947) have been from Moulin-à-Vent. But, beyond these two appellations, there are two other Crus that have struck me in recent times as extremely age-worthy in their own rights and not widely recognized as such: Côte de Brouilly and Saint-Amour. The potential of longevity of Côte de Brouilly probably has a small coterie of fans, based primarily on the very impressive track record for cellaring of the wines from the Geoffray family's beloved Château Thivin, but the commune of Saint-Amour is probably the least recognized for its ability to bring forth wines that stand the test of time with style and grace. But, my experience in the last half dozen years has confirmed that the top wines of Saint-Amour, at least when crafted in a traditional manner to maximize their potential for evolution in bottle, are at least as ageworthy as the wines from Côte de Brouilly and may well have the possibility to

reach the same peaks with long-term cellaring as the wines of Morgon and Moulin-à-Vent. This is at least true in the section of the commune which includes a bed of clay under the more sandy topsoil in Saint-Amour, which is not true in all of the vineyards in the appellation. And no one makes longer-lived and more serious examples of Saint-Amour than the Domaine des Billards.

Domaine des Billards was first put together in the second half of the eighteenth century by the Loron family, as this fine estate was founded in 1774 and has stayed in the hands of the ancestors of this family since that time. Today, the property is owned by the Barbet and Teissier family's and run with great *élan* by Xavier and Gregory Barbet. Father Xavier Barbet has just recently retired- at least ostensibly- but I have a hard time picturing him away from the estate just because he has officially reached the retirement age! Beyond the confines of Domaine des Billards, the Barbet and Teissier families have several other estates in the region, including the Château de Fleurie and the Domaine de Moulin in Moulin-à-Vent. The family also produced Pouilly-Fuissé at another property, and in addition to farming and producing wines from their own vineyards, the Barbet family has also long been in charge of the production of Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Village wines for Maison Louis Jadot through their Jean Loron *négociant* arm, with this relationship dating all the way back to 1945. Their responsibilities with Maison Jadot include sourcing grapes for these bottlings and making and raising the wines that will wear the Maison Jadot label from these two appellations. But, despite the myriad of different activities and properties that the families are involved with in the Beaujolais and Mâconnais, it is quite clear that their centerpiece estate is the Domaine des Billards.

The Domaine des Billards presently encompasses just under ten hectares of vines in the commune of Saint-Amour, located in several sections of the *vignobles* of the village, including the western sector where the Piedmont Formation clay subsoil is to be found. This western hamlet has actually been known as Les Billards for centuries and the domaine takes its name from its locale. However, only 1.78 hectares of the domaine's vines lie over this vein of clay subsoil in their parcel known as the Clos des Billards (the official name of the *lieu à dit* on the *cadastre* is just Clos), with the remaining 8.2 hectares of vines spread about in four larger parcels elsewhere in the village. One of these is just northwest of the Clos des Billards in the *lieu à dit* of Aux Grandes Vignes, which also includes a sizable percentage of the same clay subsoils found in the Clos, interspersed with granite. There are three other *lieux à dits* owned by Domaine des Billards, in sectors closer to the town of Saint-Amour itself and north of the Clos, where the soils are more typical of the appellation in general- a complex blend of principally crumbling granite and sandstone. Perhaps the vineyards in Saint-Amour that are not situated over this Piedmont Formation base of clay are not quite as long-lived as those planted where the clay resides, but this for the most part is speculative, as the name of the commune tends to help lead most young vintages of Saint-Amour to the table very early on after their bottling, as, not surprisingly, this wine is the most popular wine in France for Valentine's Day! Xavier Barbet surmises that "probably sixty percent or more of the wines from the appellation are consumed on Valentine's Day the year following the harvest." While I am all for sharing a beautiful bottle of wine with the one you love on this day, it would be a significant improvement in tradition to share a bottle of ten year-old Saint-Amour on that day, rather than five month-old Saint-Amour!

The Barbets currently make two distinct cuvées at Domaine des Billards- their "regular" Saint-Amour bottling from a blend of all five of their parcels of vines in the commune and a Clos



des Billards bottling from a subsection of their vineyard, which they also label as their “Réserve de Caveau”. The “regular” Domaine des Billards Saint-Amour bottling is produced primarily from the estate’s 8.2 hectares of vines produced outside of the Clos, but with some production from the Clos des Billards section also blended into this cuvée in all but the most ageworthy of vintages (when everything in the Clos is reserved for a separate bottling). This regular Domaine des Billards cuvée is produced by semi-carbonic maceration, as it is usually fermented as whole clusters, with the CO<sub>2</sub> released during the fermentation retained in the tank, but with no additional CO<sub>2</sub> pumped in. Extraction is done very gently, as the domaine uses a grill to keep the cap down and allow for the extraction of tannins without pressing. The maceration period for this workhorse bottling from Domaine des Billards runs from ten to fifteen days, after which the wine is raised in a combination of cement vats, older barrels and larger, (again older) wood *foudres*. While the primary focus of this article is on the special Clos des Billards bottling, I should note that I have always found that the regular bottling here is also quite ageworthy (I have drunk this cuvée all the way back to the 1989, 1978 and 1976 vintages in the not too distant past and found them all to be aging beautifully at the time of my consuming them) and one should not infer that only the production from the Clos des Billards possesses serious potential for cellaring. To underscore the ageability of the regular bottling of Domaine des Billards Saint-Amour, I have appended my previous notes of the regular bottling here at the end of the article.



*Messieurs Xavier and Gregory Barbet of Domaine des Billards in the vineyards of St. Amour.*

The Barbet family's special cuvée of Clos des Billards is produced from that specific *lieu à dit* in the village that has the quite unique *terroir* for Saint-Amour touched upon above, as this 1.78 hectare section of their vineyard contains a deep vein of clay subsoil less than one meter down from the sandstone and pulverized granite topsoil and which is quite atypical of the generally more crumbly soils found in the wider cru of Saint-Amour. It is this clay subsoil that gives the Clos des Billards its extraordinary aging capability, which at our recent vertical tasting, stretched back effortlessly fifty years! The Clos des Billards parcel has vines of varying ages in it, as some vines had to be replanted about twenty years ago, but the Barbets only take fruit from the oldest vines remaining in the Clos, which range from fifty to more than one hundred years of age, to be utilized for their Clos des Billards cuvée, with the younger vines in the Clos going into the regular bottlings. The Clos des Billards now has its own distinct label that is different from the regular bottling from the domaine, but the new label was only established with the 2009 vintage and one used to occasionally see the Barbets' Clos des Billards bottling out in the market with just a special "Réserve de Caveau" sticker attached to the bottle along with the domaine's regular label. But, as Carrie Marchal, Export Director of Maison Jean Loron, notes, "the Le Clos has always been made, and set aside for special occasions and the family cellar, but not really 'marketed' until around 2000", with the bottles at that time only made available "to some special long-time customers." She continues, "the current label and the idea to call it *Reserve Caveau* came in 2009."

Vinification for both of the estate's bottlings at Domaine des Billards is done in large, old oak vats, with indigenous yeasts, but the Clos des Billards is handled a bit differently in the cellars, as in most vintages, the grapes are completely destemmed so that a bit more extraction can be sought after, and the *cuvaison* will typically last up to ten days longer than for the regular bottling, with the same grill used to keep the cap submerged, but *pigeage* also used for the Clos during its fermentation. The *elevage* is different for the Clos des Billards bottling as well, as it is raised in a combination of small Burgundy barrels (usually three or four years of age) and older *foudres*, with no cement tanks used for this bottling. Once the Clos des Billards is bottled, it will then settle in for at least five years of additional bottle aging in the domaine's cellars before it will be released into the market. It is a limited bottling, with the wine only produced in top, structured vintages such as 2005, 2009 or 2011, and the quantity produced very much dependent on the vintage. In general, one can expect anywhere from two hundred to five hundred cases of Clos des Billards to be produced in the years that the Barbet family believes that the vintages' quality and style lend themselves to a long-lived bottling, and in certain years, magnums and double magnums will also be produced in limited number. As the notes below will attest, fifty years or more of aging potential for the Clos des Billards is the norm for this lovely wine, and it is clearly one of the most ageworthy of Cru Beaujolais bottlings produced in the region.

The vast majority of the following wines were savored at a vertical tasting generously put together by Xavier Barbet and Carrie Marchal in March of this year in New York. The Barbet family very kindly dug into their family cellar to pull out a handful of the oldest vintages they still have in the cellar of the Clos des Billards, which predated by several decades the creation of this bottling for the general market in 2009. Our lineup of Clos des Billards went all the way back to 1967, and was augmented by the Domaine des Billards bottlings from 2015, 2014 and 2011 vintages. By luck, I happened to have a bottle of the 2011 Clos des Billards in my cellar, which I had carried back from France and I was able to add that note for the article (though with

some regret, as I kept thinking I really should have not touched that bottle for another twenty years!) and provide a thorough look at the Clos des Billards bottlings that have found their way onto the market since the start of the new century. After the notes on our recent vertical tasting and my bottle of 2011 Clos des Billards, I have reprinted the notes on several older vintages of the Domaine des Billards bottling that Xavier Barbet generously sent me for an earlier article on Beaujolais back in 2010, when I first became aware of just how good the wines were from this domaine and had not yet had much experience with older vintages. I hope the notes in the two sections will impress readers that the wines from this superb domaine are to be unequivocally included on the short list of the most age-worthy wines of Beaujolais! They are also some of the very best.

### ***Domaine des Billards and Clos des Billards Saint-Amour***

#### **2015 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

This was my first taste of the 2015 Domaine des Billards and the wine was showing very nicely, with the buxom personality of the 2015 vintage quite in evidence. This is fully 14.5 percent alcohol, making it one of the ripest vintages at the domaine in the last quarter century, but the wine handles this very well and retains good freshness to go along with its powerful personality and Xavier Barbet is very positive about its cellaring potential. The ripe bouquet jumps from the glass in a plush mix of black cherries, a touch of cocoa, gamebird, bonfire and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a plump core of fruit, modest tannins and a very long, velvety and well-balanced finish. I may be underrating this a bit out of the blocks, but I want to see what size and shape it ultimately will show once the beautiful puppy fat of fruit has backed off a bit with bottle age. 2017-2035+. **89+**.

#### **2014 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

The 2014 vintage of Domaine des Billards is absolutely classic in profile and I have enjoyed this wine's potential since the first time I tasted it back in the summer of 2015. It remains still a youthful wine, and after this deep vertical tasting, I would be more loathe to open bottles of the 2014 early on, as it has such superb potential for very positive evolution in the bottle. That said, the wine is admittedly drinking beautifully today, offering up a sappy nose of red and black cherries, vinesmoke, a lovely base of soil tones, a touch of pepper and a topnote of espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with the tight-knit personality of youth, a lovely core, fine soil signature and a long, tangy and modestly tannic finish. This is very good today and will be even better down the road! 2019-2045. **93**.

#### **2011 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

The 2011 Domaine des Billards has long been one of my favorite Crus of the vintage and the wine is just starting to stir a bit on the nose and show some of its secondary layers of complexity, delivering a lovely constellation of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, gamebird, dark soil tones and woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with outstanding focus and grip, fine-grained, suave tannins and a very, very long, tangy and soil-driven finish. It remains very early days for this great vintage of Saint-Amour, but this remains one of the greatest recent years at Domaine des Billards and this wine will be absolutely stunning for decades to come. 2017-2055. **94+**.

#### **2011 Saint-Amour "Clos des Billards"- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

I had not tasted the 2011 Clos des Billards bottling since Gregory Barbet had generously brought it along to a tasting of the domaine's wines in Beaune back in the spring of 2015, when the wine was still just a baby and still in the throes of a stormy youth. Two more years' worth of



bottle age have allowed the wine to settle in nicely, but this is still a very young wine, as the inherent structure of the 2011 vintage and the deep soils of the Clos have conspired to produce a wine built for the long haul. The bouquet today remains quite primary, offering up scents of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, incipient spice tones, dark soil, espresso and a touch of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a solid core of fruit, fine transparency, tangy acids, modest tannins and impressive length and grip on the long and youthful finish. This is still at least a half dozen years away from really blossoming, but it is evolving nicely and looks likely to be even better than I had initially hypothesized and my score may well prove still to be overly conservative, as the wine remains quite closed at the present time. 2023-2060. **92+**.

**2009 Saint-Amour “Clos des Billards”- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

I had not tasted a bottle of the 2009 Clos des Billards since the start of 2013, so I was very curious to see how this wine was evolving with a bit of proper bottle age. As it begins its eighth year the wine is really starting to drink nicely, offering up a deep and black fruity nose of black cherries, chocolate, a touch of fresh date, dark soil tones, a bit of hung game and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and nascent complexity, melting tannins and a very long, wide open and velvety finish. This is ripe in the style of the 2009 vintage, but the wine is aging very gracefully and is now at a very good place for current drinking. 2017-2030+. **92**.



### **2005 Saint-Amour “Clos des Billards”- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

This was my first go round with the 2005 Clos des Billards , as I had only tasted the regular and the “Reserve” bottlings of Domaine des Billards from this vintage previously. The 2005 Clos des Billards was everything I was hoping for in a combination of a great, old vine parcel and a superb vintage, as the wine delivers a fine and still youthful bouquet of sappy red and black cherries, raw cocoa, a touch of nutskin, gamebird, woodsmoke and lovely spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very sappy at the core, with impeccable balance and focus, superb complexity and a very long, tangy and still moderately tannic finish. Like the 2005 red Burgundies from further north, the 2005 Clos des Billards is going to be a long distance runner and will continue to improve with further bottle age. A great wine. 2017-2055+. **94+**.

### **2003 Saint-Amour “Clos des Billards”- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

I am not sure that my expectations for the 2003 Clos des Billards were all that high, given how hot the summer of '03 was in France, but the wine turned out to be a very pleasant surprise and augurs well for the medium-term evolution of other more recent, ripe vintages like 2009 and 2015. The bouquet on the 2003 wafts from the glass in a deep, complex and quite impressive blend of desiccated cherries, a touch of prune, *sous bois*, hung game and a beautiful panoply of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet for 2003, with a plush core, lovely focus and complexity and a very long, *à point* finish. This will not be a long-lived vintage of Clos des Billards, but it will continue to drink with impressive complexity and grace for at least the next dozen years. A revelation! 2017-2030. **92**.

### **2000 Saint-Amour “Clos des Billards”- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

I had tasted the 2000 vintage of Domaine des Billards all the way back in 2010 and had liked the wine very much, but the Clos des Billards from this vintage is a notable step up in depth and structural integrity from the regular bottling. This was an early harvest in Beaujolais, with the grapes brought in on August 27<sup>th</sup> and with quite generous yields, so clearly the old vines in the Clos helped add a chassis for longer-term aging. Today, the wine is drinking beautifully and has really reached its apogee, soaring from the glass in a beautiful blaze of black cherries, red plums, raw cocoa, *sous bois*, an exotic touch of red curry and *pigeon*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fully mature, but still with great vibrancy and bounce. The finish is very long, complex and wide open, there is still plenty of depth at the core and the bright acids will continue to carry this wine nicely into the future, despite the fact that the tannins have all melted away. A superb bottle. 2017-2030. **93**.

### **1999 Saint-Amour “Clos des Billards”- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

I cannot recall the 1999 vintage being highly lauded in Beaujolais, but back in these days, my focus was a bit monolithic and I paid for more attention to what was going on in the Côte d’Or than I did to Beaujolais. However, given how strong the vintage was further north, I suppose it was also top flight in the Beaujolais region and the 1999 Clos des Billards certainly bears testimony to this likelihood, as the wine is spectacular! The bouquet is far more youthful than the fully resolved 2000 version, delivering a pure and exuberant mélange of red and black cherries, a touch of blood orange, incipient notes of forest floor and beautiful spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and gloriously sappy at the core, with outstanding focus and balance, tangy acids, still a bit of suave backend tannins and stunning length and grip on the energetic finish. I would suggest that this is still a few years away from peaking and I would try not to touch a bottle for a few more years, just to let it reach the same point of evolution as the utterly *à point* 2000 vintage. 2020-2050+. **95+**.

**1995 Saint-Amour “Clos des Billards”- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

The 1995 vintage of Clos des Billards is utterly classic in profile and is now in its plateau of peak drinking. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a complex mix of red and black cherries, cocoa, *sous bois*, gamebird and again, the signature topnote of lovely spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and elegant, with perfect resolution, still good mid-palate depth, melted tannins and a long, complex and bouncy finish. One could not ask for a better moment to be drinking the '95 Clos des Billards, but this wine still has decades of life ahead of it. 2017-2035. **93.**

**1976 Saint-Amour “Clos des Billards”- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

1976 was a drought vintage in Beaujolais (as it was further north in the Côte d'Or), so I imagine that this wine was a bit chewy out of the blocks and needed some time in the cellar to blossom. However, at age forty-one, the wine is now of course fully mature and is drinking with exceptional style and grace, soaring from the glass in a beautiful aromatic blend of cherries, blood orange, an exotic touch of fresh mint, gamebird, *sous bois*, bonfire and those Saint-Amour spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very transparent in profile, with fine mid-palate stuffing, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the vibrant and fully mature finish. A beautiful bottle with plenty of life still ahead. 2017-2040+. **94.**

**1969 Saint-Amour “Clos des Billards”- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

The two oldies that Xavier Barbet brought along for our vertical tasting both proved to be outstanding and drinking with plenty of verve and complexity. The 1969 vintage in Saint-Amour was a small crop, as some mid-season hail reduced yields, but the *fin de saison* was outstanding the grapes ripened superbly. At nearly fifty years of age, the Clos des Billards '69 is drinking splendidly, delivering a complex nose of desiccated cherries, a touch of orange peel, gamebird, forest floor, cigar box and coffee. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and classy, with superb focus and grip, still solid mid-palate stuffing and a long, complex and fully mature finish. As this wine sat in the glass over an extended period a bit of volatile acidity started to poke through, which makes me think that the wine is probably getting to the far side of the plateau and will start its gentle decline in the not too distant future, but at age forty-eight, who is going to start complaining? 2017-2025+. **92.**

**1967 Saint-Amour “Clos des Billards”- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

The 1967 Clos des Billards is also drinking beautifully, with plenty of tertiary layers of complexity and a lovely, autumnal personality. It is not as transparent in personality as either the 1976 or the 1969 versions, but there is still plenty of enjoyment to be had here and it is more structurally sound today than the '69. The complex bouquet offers up scents of red and black cherries, charred wood, gamebird, lovely spice tones and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and fully mature, with still a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, poised and very nicely balanced finish. Fine juice. 2017-2035. **91.**



***Previously Tasted Older Vintages of Domaine des Billards***

**2007 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

The 2007 Saint-Amour is a stellar bottle, with a deep and serious nose of black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of black truffle, complex soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a touch of cedar in the upper register. On the palate is full-bodied, deep and succulent, with lovely complexity, a very soil-driven personality for Saint-Amour, modest tannins, zesty acids and superb length and grip on the long and intensely flavored finish. This is a stunning bottle of Saint-Amour that will age magically- provided one can keep the hands off of it long enough to allow it to develop. It is so tasty right now, that will be no easy task. Great wine. 2009-2025+. **93+.**

**2006 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

The 2006 Saint-Amour from Domaine des Billards is a lovely bottle that is now drinking at its apogee, but should have no difficulties aging gracefully for at least the next decade or more. The nose is deep and very lovely, as it jumps from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, violets, woodsmoke, gentle herb tones and a lovely base of complex soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tangy, with fine mid-palate depth, impressive complexity and very good length and grip on the focused and beautifully balanced finish. Very classy juice. 2010-2020+. **91.**

**2005 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

The 2005 Domaine des Billards is still a tad on the young side and is clearly still climbing in quality. The bouquet is deep, pure and nascently complex, as it offers up a sappy mélange of pomegranate, black cherries, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, refined soil tones and a touch of espresso in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on

the attack, with a rock solid core of fruit, still a bit of ripe tannin to resolve, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and palate-staining finish. This is a serious bottle of Saint-Amour that still needs a few more years in the cellar to fully blossom. It should prove to be very long-lived and have a very wide spectrum of peak drinkability. 2013-2040. **93+**.

**2000 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

The 2000 St. Amour from Domaine des Billards is a delightful wine that is drinking beautifully at age ten. The nose offers up a classy blend of cherries, roses, vinesmoke, a touch of white pepper, nice gamey qualities and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and just a touch angular by the very high standards of this family estate, with melting tannins and fine length and grip on the complex finish. A very good example of the vintage. 2010-2020. **88**.

**1989 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

I tasted this wine back in the spring of 2010, not long after it had been shipped from France to the US. Crossing paths with a bottle in Beaujolais at the end of 2010 clearly showed that I should have let this wine settle in a bit longer after its trans-Atlantic trip, as this most recent bottle was even more stunning than the last! This is a great bottle of St. Amour that offers up a very pure and complex nose of red cherries, blood orange, beautifully complex minerality, fresh herb tones, a gentle smokiness and a fine dollop of coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure, with lovely transparency, a magical core of sappy red fruit, superb focus and brightness and a very long, complex and bouncy finish. Just a beautiful bottle from one of the best vintages in Beaujolais in my lifetime, the 1989 Domaine des Billards still has decades of life left ahead of it. 2010-2030+. **95**.

**1978 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

The 1978 St. Amour from Domaine des Billards has aged beautifully and at age thirty-two is a round, velvety and vibrant glass of wine at its apogee. The bouquet offers up a complex and classy mélange of desiccated cherries, blood orange, woodsmoke, delicate herbal tones and a lovely base of complex soil nuances. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and very intensely flavored, with lovely focus and complexity, bouncy acids and impressive length and grip on the suave and seamless finish. A lovely wine with years of life still ahead of it. 2010-2020+. **91**.

**1976 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)**

The 1976 St. Amour was the oldest vintage I tasted for this report from the Loron family, though I have little doubt that the domaine's cellars include even older vintages that would still be drinking splendidly, as this '76 shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The nose is deep, complex and shows off the ripeness of the vintage in a blend of roasted red fruit, woodsmoke, cranberries, acorns, fresh herbs and a lovely base of autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and vibrant, with bright acidity, lovely mid-palate depth, excellent focus and balance and amazingly, still a touch of tannin yet to resolve on the long and classy finish. In comparison to the more ethereal 1978, the 1976 Domaine des Billards is a bit bigger wine that should age a bit longer, but still offers up the impressive elegance of the Loron family's wines. A lovely, lovely bottle. 2010-2025+. **92**.



## ANOTHER NOD TO THE MAESTRO OF PIEMONTE BRUNO GIACOSA IN THE AUTUMN OF A GREAT CAREER



It is hard to believe that ten years have now passed since I wrote my first historical profile on the legendary Bruno Giacosa. Where does the time go? Since I first worked on that article on Bruno Giacosa, a few things changed and then returned to normal at the winery. Long-time oenologist, Dante Scaglione, who first began working alongside of Bruno in 1992, departed the winery in the spring of 2008 and was replaced later that year by Giorgio Lavagna, who remained with the family estate until May of 2011, at which time *Signore* Scaglione returned to the cellars here in Neive on a consulting basis. Did the wines change during the alternation between Dante Scaglione and Giorgio Lavagna? I have not tasted any of the youngest vintages here, as I have not had a chance to visit the cellars in Neive, but there have been numerous reports from those visiting that the quality did change a bit from its lofty peak during this period when Dante was not working with the Giacosa family. I do note that the winery has decided to declassify all of their 2010 Baroli and Barbareschi and released none of these bottlings under their own label, which is probably a sign that not everything was running as smoothly as usual at this time, but also demonstrates the winery's commitment to excellence remains unchanged.

My goal with this second report on the Giacosa family winery is not to cover all of the information that was in the first article, but rather to bring the history up to the present time and also publish notes on the bottles of Giacosa wine that I have been lucky enough to drink over the last few years. For newer subscribers who have not seen the first Bruno Giacosa feature, I would be happy to send it to them or it can be easily accessed in its entirety through the database. It includes a pretty good synopsis of all the various bottlings that *Signor* Giacosa produced during his long and illustrious career. At the time of my last report on this great estate back in February of 2007, Bruno Giacosa had suffered a serious stroke the year before and had spent much of 2006 in the hospital recovering. He made a very good recovery over the course of that year and was able to regain his ability to walk again by the end of his rehab, and was still fairly active in the winery up through the autumn of 2011. However, during the harvest of that year, Bruno fell and broke his leg, which has kept him in a wheelchair ever since, though he is still to be found around the winery quite often and he remains the spiritual leader of this great estate, despite his more limited role since his fall. For many years, his daughter, Bruna Giacosa has been the public face of the winery, managing the day to day operations and travelling indefatigably to promote the estate and share tastings with the legions of Bruno Giacosa connoisseurs the world over. Her sister Marina Giacosa has also been active in running the winery with Bruna for several years now.

If winemakers are like chefs, there can be little doubt that Bruno Giacosa has been one of the truly greatest chefs of his generation and his seminal place in the pantheon of talented producers in the world of wine is in the same exalted realm as people such as Henri Mayer, as both of these gentlemen have made a mark on their respective regions that far transcends the unmistakable beauty of their wines. Both men have served as inspirations for the talented younger generation of winegrowers who have followed in their footsteps, and the renaissance that both Piemonte and Burgundy experience today can certainly be at least partially credited to the trailblazing of people such as Monsieur Mayer and *Signor* Giacosa. Bruno Giacosa was the very first producer in Piemonte to bottle a pair of single vineyard wines and label them as such for the marketplace, as his 1964 Barbaresco “Santa Stefano” *Normale* and *Riserva Speciale* bottlings were the very first “cru” bottlings to be made in the region; Renato Ratti’s first release of his Barolo “Marcenasco” single vineyard wine was not produced until the 1965 vintage. *Signor* Ratti was certainly the spiritual leader of the movement to begin bottling single crus on their own in both Barolo and Barbaresco, as he publicly championed this rather revolutionary (at the time) concept from the early 1960s onwards, but it was *Signor* Giacosa who labeled the first single vineyard wines from Santa Stefano in 1964. In this vintage, he produced two blended Barbaresco bottlings in addition to both his Santa Stefano *Normale* and a *Riserva Speciale*.

Today, we take for granted the wide variety of single vineyard wines produced in Piemonte and think of this northerly region as Italy’s answer to Burgundy, but up until the pioneering efforts of both Bruno Giacosa and Renato Ratti in the 1960s, the prevailing wisdom amongst the finest winemakers of the region was that a blended example of either Barolo or Barbaresco was a superior wine to one made solely from a single vineyard. The perceived wisdom at the time was that a well done blend could draw upon the strengths of several different crus, allowing for a more complete, harmonious and complex bottling than any single vineyard wine. While there was a very long tradition of blending, one should note that in the Giacosa cellars, the family would often keep their production from the Santa Stefano and Gallina



vineyards in Neive separate throughout the vinification and *elevage* of the wines and only blend them together prior to bottling, and in some vintages, there would be a significant percentage of the Santa Stefano that would remain on its own to be kept for the family cellar and a few long-time private clients. So, even before Bruno initiated two separate bottlings of Santa Stefano in 1964, there was already a small, quite tradition of keeping the production from this vineyard on its own in the cellars here. Bruno's first single vineyard bottlings from Santa Stefano in 1964 would be followed up in 1967 with single vineyard wines from Asili in Barbaresco and a Barolo "Collina Rionda di Serralunga" in Barolo.

Bruno Giacosa was born in 1929 and will be celebrating his eighty-eighth birthday this year, so it seemed like the time was ripe for another feature on this superb winemaker and his brilliant expressions of Barbaresco and Barolo. *Signor* Giacosa was born and raised in the village of Neive, which is one of the three communities that make up the region of Barbaresco. He comes from a family of winemakers, as both his grandfather Carlo and his father, Mario Giacosa were important producers in Barbaresco in their own time, though the move to selling the family's wines in bottle did not really come fully to fruition until Bruno took over as the head of the family business in 1961. Prior to this time, the wines would be sold in the traditional fashion of the era, which was primarily in demi-johns to clients, with instructions on how to bottle the wines, if the client was so inclined. Bruno's grandfather, Carlo Giacosa has started the family business in the late nineteenth century, purchasing fruit from local growers and making the wines in his cellars in Neive. His son, Mario Giacosa continued to build upon the reputation for quality of the family's wines during his era, though during the economic downturn in the region that really began at the time of his father's passing in 1929, a more important aspect of his business became acting as a grape broker purchasing fruit from top vineyards and selling it on to other wineries, with his own wines playing a secondary role in the family business during much of the 1930s and 1940s. Mario Giacosa began to sell a significant percentage of his production in bottle, as well as demi-john, again in the years following the second world war. However, it would not be until Bruno took over in 1961 from his father that the percentage of the family's wine production sold in bottle would come to eclipse that of the percentage sold in demi-johns.

Bruno Giacosa officially joined his father in the family business in 1944, as the second world war was winding down in Italy. He was fifteen years of age. He worked alongside of his father, learning his winemaking from Mario and spending lots of time out in the cascading hillside vineyards of Barbaresco. Piemonte was one of the poorer sections of Italy for most of the twentieth century, and the second world war and its aftermath certainly did not help things financially, so that the farmers in the region had to practice mixed agriculture to survive, with grapes just one of many crops grown in the fields surrounding the towns of Barbaresco. It was probably in Bruno's formative years as a teenager in the family business that he really began his mastery of the vineyards of both Barbaresco and Barolo, and his astute knowledge of the various *terroirs* of the region would serve him well as his career unfolded. In fact, the Giacosa family was a bit late in comparison to some of the other prominent winemaking families in the region in starting to buy their own vineyards, as the Gaja family bought many of their finest vineyards in Barbaresco in the decade of the 1950s, but the Giacosa family would not buy their first vineyard until 1982, when they purchased the Falletto vineyard in Serralunga (from which they had been buying the fruit from the previous owner since the 1967 vintage). Of course, amongst the other important Barbaresco producers in this era, the Gaja family had a very successful construction

business in the 1940s and 1950s, which would have been of great assistance in purchasing vineyards in the lean years of the 1950s, and this option may simply have not been open to the Giacosa family, who relied solely on their wine business for their livelihood and Barbaresco and Barolo were most emphatically not expensive wines in the 1950s and 1960s!



*Bruna Giacosa and Bruno Giacosa on a beautiful summer day in Neive .*

In any event, Bruno Giacosa succeeded his father Mario as the head of the family business in 1961 and sought to start selling more of the family production as bottled wines right from the outset. Bruno had never studied oenology in his formative years, rather learning his winemaking skills at the side of his father in the cellars after each harvest, but what seems to have defined his winemaking style from his very earliest vintages is a very precise and non-interventionist approach in the cellars, relying on the great fruit that he had purchased to deliver most of the quality to the finished wines down the road. Many of his contemporaries will acknowledge that Bruno Giacosa knew the vineyards of both Barbaresco and Barolo as well as anyone in the region and it was no surprise that he would purchase grapes from the very finest vineyard sites for the production of his own wines. In his heyday, though Bruno was not farming the vineyards himself, he was always out in the vines, making suggestions and aiding the farmers that he would be purchasing grapes from at harvest time and one has to imagine that he was getting the very finest grapes each year from the growers with whom he collaborated. In fact, since Bruno's stroke in 2006 and his subsequent inability to move around as he had previously, the family winery has moved in the direction of primarily producing Baroli and Barbareschi bottlings from their own estate-grown fruit and no longer purchasing grapes for these bottlings.

After the purchase of the ten hectare Falletto di Serralunga vineyard in 1982, the Giacosa family did not buy any other parcels of vines until 1996, when it became possible to purchase plots in two of Barbaresco's greatest vineyards: Asili and Rabajà. These parcels were purchased together from the Odore family. Today, the family owns two and a half hectares of Asili from this purchase in 1996 and this is now their flagship cru bottling of Barbaresco. The family's original one hectare parcel in Rabajà bought at the same time has been a bit more problematic-

though not for the quality of the wine from here, which has always been exceptional since its debut vintage of '96. The problem is that the “official” boundaries for the crus in the hillside that houses Asili, Rabajà and Martinenga had never been finalized until a few years ago, and the Giacosa parcel of vines here in Rabajà lies on the western end of the vineyard, alongside of Asili. Since 2006, it has now been determined officially that these vines are actually part of Asili and not Rabajà! As the *terroirs* in the two parcels are quite dissimilar, Bruno and Bruna Giacosa have decided that the production from this formerly Rabajà section of vines (that are now officially in Asili) will only go into their regular bottling of Barbaresco.

The original Asili parcels that were purchased in 1996 (there are two of these on the western slope, with a slice in between the two owned by Ca' del Biao) have a westerly exposition and fine, limestone soils that give Asili its classic and nearly unmatched elegance. They are not on the summit of the hill of Asili (known as Bricco Asili), where the vines of the Produttori del Barbaresco and Ceretto are located, but a bit further down the slope in the bowl-shaped area of the vineyard, which is a bit warmer as a result of it being better sheltered from the wind. The other parcel purchased from the Odore family in '96 that was formerly Rabajà, but which has now been reclassified as Asili, lies on the other side of the crest of the hill of Bricco Asili, on the eastern end of the new boundaries of the vineyard and has a due southerly exposition, as it faces Martinenga in this direction. The wine that the Giacosas produced here was always a bit more black fruity and robust in character (in the classic style of Rabajà) and it is understandable that the family would be loath to blend the two together simply because the “official” boundaries have now been agreed upon.

Happily, in 2013, the winery was able to buy another new parcel within the official 2006 delimitations of Rabajà, from Lorenzo Alutto, so that beginning in this vintage, they have been able to again start producing an example of Rabajà that will appear under the Giacosa label. In both 2013 and 2014, this will be a *Normale* or White Label bottling. This plot of vines is further east and north of their previous parcel of vines in Rabajà, and a bit smaller as well at about a half hectare. As Bruna Giacosa comments about this new parcel, our “new Rabajà is an old vineyard with a different *terroir* from the previous one- more clayey and less sandy.” I am very much looking forward to tasting this new example of Rabajà from the Giacosa family in the future, as it will be interesting to compare its personality to that of the previous bottling from this vineyard! I would love to see the Giacosa family come up with a solution for their first parcel of Rabajà (that has now been moved within the boundaries of Asili) that is more satisfactory than blending it into the regular Barbaresco (when one is made) or selling it off in bulk, as this is truly a great *terroir* and it deserves its own bottling in the Giacosa constellation- no matter what the name! I fully understand and support their decision not to blend it into the Asili bottling, as based on the previous tastings of the wines from 1996 until 2006, the two are quite different in *terroir* and personality. But, perhaps the production from this former-Rabajà parcel of vines could be bottled on its own again and renamed as a Barbaresco “Vigna Bruno” cuvée that would distinguish it from both the Asili and new Rabajà bottlings from the winery, and yet allow this gorgeous fruit to shine on its own once again?

Another change that has occurred in recent times is that the winery will no longer be producing wines from the Santa Stefano vineyard in Neive. For many lovers of Bruno Giacosa's wines, the Santa Stefano bottling was synonymous with the winery, but the vineyard has actually

been owned in its entirety by the Castello di Neive for many decades and this bottling was always produced from purchased fruit. In the old days, Bruno Giacosa could often be found walking out in the Santa Stefano vineyard and no doubt he had significant impact on how the vines were farmed and which section of the vineyard would provide the fruit that he purchased here. After his broken leg in 2011 this was, of course, no longer possible, and I have understood that with the recent decision of the Castello di Neive to replant a portion of the vineyard of Santa Stefano, the Giacosas will not produce any bottlings of Barbaresco “Santa Stefano” after the 2011 vintage. When I asked Bruna Giacosa about the Santa Stefano, she noted that “we stopped producing it because of our choice of vinifying only grapes from our own property for Baroli and Barbareschi,” so that all of the Giacosa bottlings of these two DOCGs will be solely produced from estate-grown fruit from 2012 onwards. Again, the decision is totally logical and the family now has enough superb vineyards to support their needs of fruit for both Barolo and Barbaresco, but I am still having a hard time getting used to the idea of a wine world without a Santa Stefano bottling from the Giacosa family. It feels like the end of an era!

The Giacosa family had also expanded their holdings in Barolo since I last wrote my piece on the estate, or more accurately, did so just before I wrote that article, but I did not include this information on the first historical feature on Bruno Giacosa. The family has expanded beyond its traditional Barolo base in the village of Serralunga d’Alba, where they bought the Falletto vineyard in 1982, to purchase the Croera vineyard in La Morra. This purchase was made in 2004, but only in the inaugural vintage of 2004 did the winery produce a single vineyard bottling from this vineyard. This was the family’s first foray into the village of La Morra for a Barolo, as even back in the days when Bruno Giacosa was producing a bevy of different Barolo *Cru* bottlings from purchased grapes, he had only worked with fruit from the villages of Serralunga, Castiglione Falletto and Monforte d’Alba. I have yet to taste the 2004 Barolo “Vigna Croera di La Morra” from the winery, but hope to have a chance to do so one of these days, as I am curious to taste the family’s magical touch with a completely new *terroir* to me! The vineyard is not one of the most highly-regarded *terroirs* in La Morra, but it will still be very interesting to see how the 2004 evolves with extended bottle age. In any event, the ownership of this two and a half hectare vineyard in La Morra did not last too long, as the family sold it again in 2012 in anticipation of adding their new parcel in Rabajà. Bruna Giacosa tells me that the family only used the fruit from this vineyard in the 2004 bottling and in every subsequent vintage it was sold off in bulk.

Presently, the estate-bottled wines from Bruno Giacosa and his family are differentiated from the wines made from purchased fruit by a different company name on the base of their respective labels. Wines made from the family’s own vineyards are labeled as “Azienda Agricola Falletto di Bruno Giacosa”, while wines that are made from purchased fruit are marked as “Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa.” This distinction between wines produced from estate-grown fruit and purchased fruit took effect in 1996, and prior to this, all of the wines here were labeled “Casa Vinicola Bruno Giacosa”. In all other respects the labels remain identical, with non-Riserva bottlings sporting a white label, and Riserva bottlings (also sometimes known in the vernacular as the Red Label bottlings) in their maroon or burnt umber colors. The color of labels on the Giacosa Riservas has changed a bit over the years, as they were more maroon in the 1970s and 1980s and switched to a more brownish, or burnt umber, color beginning with the 1996s. There have been *Normale* bottlings of both Barbaresco and Barolo produced from the estate, without a

vineyard designation, since 1961, but the last vintage that I am aware of where there is a blended (or at least non-vineyard-designated bottling) is 2008 for Barbaresco and 2005 for Barolo (with all the fruit for this wine coming from the Falletto di Serralunga, as the Croera was sold off in bulk in '05). It may be that the winery will no longer produce these wines and have all of their Baroli and Barbareschi bottlings be vineyard designates in the future. When I asked Bruna Giacosa about this, she answered, "yes, it is true that we do not produce much regular Barolo and regular Barbaresco- this is because all of our customers want our crus."

While the primary focus of this article is on the Barbaresco and Barolo bottlings of the Giacosa family, Bruno Giacosa during his career has always made a range of other classic Piemontese wines and these were also of great quality and character. One of his most important contributions to the region was the reemergence of the white wine of Arneis in the region, which was primarily a result of Bruno Giacosa beginning to make his version in the 1970s. He always made this wine from purchased grapes during the more active phase of his career and his daughter Bruna Giacosa has carried on the practice since taking over the reins of the property. It remains an excellent wine. Bruno Giacosa has also made outstanding examples of Dolcetto d'Alba, Barbera d'Alba and even Grignolino over the course of his career, including a single vineyard bottling of Barbera from the Ginestra vineyard in Monforte in 1974 (the same vintage in which he produced a white label Barolo from this vineyard, reported on below). There is also a Nebbiolo d'Alba "Valmaggiore" bottling here, which has been produced from purchased grapes (though I imagine that in some more difficult vintages, this has been augmented on occasion with declassified Barbaresco or Barolo juice). The winery also makes an excellent sparkling wine from pinot noir grapes, which is finished off as an Extra Brut. There used to be both a regular and a Rosé version of this Spumante, but the Rosé is being discontinued and there will only be one sparkling Giacosa wine in the future.

As I went into the winemaking practices of Bruno Giacosa in some depth in the last feature on this great producer, I will only do a thumbnail sketch here. The key ingredient, according to *Signor* Giacosa, to the great success of his wines was always laid on the quality of the grapes and the *terroir* of the vineyards with which he worked, and his winemaking was always of secondary importance in his mind. His cellar practices were traditional, but not exactly the same as other important traditionalists in the region in his era, as he would often practice a shorter period of maceration for his wines than was typical at estates such as Giuseppe Mascarello or Giacomo Conterno in those days. Typically, and this would naturally vary from vintage to vintage and wine to wine, maceration periods would last from fourteen to twenty-four days for the Giacosa bottlings of Barolo and Barbaresco (the more practiced range in the 1970s at other traditionalist estates would be anywhere from thirty to sixty days), with the wines fermented in a combination of either wooden or stainless steel vats. Aging was always done in *Botti*, but *Signor* Giacosa was a bit different than most of his classically-minded contemporaries in preferring French oak to Slavonian oak for his *Botti*, but each would use older casks and not utilize any new wood. The winery has started using some larger casks made by the fine Austrian *tonnelier* of Stockinger in recent years (one can find these excellent *foudres* in Champagne and the best cellars in Germany as well these days) and Bruna Giacosa comments that "we consider these to be excellent" in quality.



In the earliest years of Bruno Giacosa's career, his Barbaresco and Barolo cuvées would typically spend six or seven years in *Botti* prior to bottling, but this was reduced in the latter years of his active career to three or four years. *Signor* Giacosa attributed this evolution to a shorter period of oak aging to changes in the climate and environment in the 1980s and 1990s, where pollution, pesticides and general climate change all produced wines that matured a bit more briskly during their time in these huge casks and needed bottling sooner. It is only when the wines are finally ready for bottling that the Giacosa family decided which wines will be released as *Riservas* and which as *Normales*. As I mentioned in my first article on *Signor* Giacosa, the policy at the winery since the 1990 vintage is to only produce one *Riserva* each from Barbaresco and Barolo in any given vintage where the quality is deemed sufficiently high for a Giacosa *Riserva*, and consequently, the quality of the White Label bottlings is even higher today than may have been the case in the 1970s and 1980s, when Bruno might bottle several *Riservas* from each of the two regions in a great vintage. As I wrote back in 2007 and believe even more strongly today, the White Label bottlings from Bruno Giacosa are great, great wines in their own right and are very, very close in quality to the *Riservas* and should not be ignored!

Of course, the biggest change in the world of Bruno Giacosa's wines in the last ten years has not been in the cellars in Neive, nor in their vineyard patrimony, but in the perceptions of the market to these great wines, which have become the "gold standard" of classically-styled Barbaresco and Barolo since I last wrote my article on the estate. Consequently, most of the older vintages have now become very expensive items, with most mature Giacosa crus now well over a thousand dollars a bottle. While it is gratifying to see the world of wine fully show

appreciation of the brilliant winemaking of Bruno Giacosa over his long career, not to mention the continued excellence of the property under the direction of his daughter Bruna Giacosa, the significant increase in the price per bottle of many of the mature Giacosa wines has put this winery out of the reach of many wine lovers. This is particularly true of many younger wine collectors, who simply do not have the discretionary income to pay today's stiff prices for mature examples from the estate, or if they do have such purchasing power, often have to choose between a great old bottle of Bruno Giacosa wine and a couple of cases of another very good, old school Piemontese producer's wines. It is not always an easy decision to make! It is unfortunate on one level that the wines have become so expensive, as given the legendary status of *Signor* Giacosa, many people now speak of his wines without having had the good fortune to really drink them with any frequency- maybe a young bottle here or there- but, no serious depth of experience with the wines at a properly mature age. For those who do not have a lot of opportunity to taste these wines, let me just say that unlike many things in this world with exalted reputations, the wines of the Giacosa family are indeed everything that they are made out to be- as profoundly beautiful an expression of the magical *terroirs* of the greatest vineyards in Piemonte as one could ever hope to find! They are every bit as stunning as their reputation declares.

In my feature on Bruno Giacosa back in early 2007, I wrote a bit about how the wines evolve over the course of their lives in bottle, and I think this is worthwhile to revisit a bit, now that the older wines are so much more costly and so many lovers of Piemontese wines no longer have the same opportunity to drink these wines with regularity. In my experience, all of Bruno Giacosa's wines go through a prolonged period of hibernation during their lives in the bottle, and one can be almost underwhelmed if one opens a bottle during this period of time when they are shut down. Each vintage behaves a bit differently in this regard, but generally after four or five years out from the release date of each wine, they will tend to start closing down for hibernation and are not at their best again for at least a decade out from the point they start to close. They do not go into a "dumb phase" as we used to say about classically-styled Bordeaux back in the day, but they become far more muted in their expression of fruit (which is often downright sappy at the outset and returns to this once the wines are starting to truly mature), which seems almost dulled in comparison to the youth of the wine, and the depth of fruit here does not seem anywhere near as profound as when the wine was first released. The structure of the wine also comes into ascendancy in the balance during the wine's hibernation, so that one has the sense that, though all of the youthful complexity remains, the fruit has already started to fade and the wine could be starting to dry out.

However, this is just a transitory phase and once the wine emerges from this period of sleepiness, the fruit roars back in all of its sappy majesty and the wine again delivers on all of its initial promise. It is hard to say how long this closed phase lasts in each wine, but in very general terms, I would suggest that ten years is about the right ballpark figure, and during this period of time, it is best to just let the wines snooze in the cellar. It is not that they are not still very good when shut down, but they are not remotely what they will be when their hibernation is complete and it is best to just exercise patience and allow the wines the time they need in bottle. Now, it is possible that this period of hibernation may be a bit shorter or not quite as dramatic in the more recent vintages here, as Dante Scaglione has sought to rotate through the older *botti* in the cellars on a more frequent basis here in the last decade or so that he has been the cellar master or



consultant, and this may ameliorate the effect of the hibernation period a bit in the more recent vintages. Certainly, the 2004 Barolo “Falletto di Serralunga” that I tasted recently and wrote up in the short report on the vintage earlier in this issue did not seem anywhere near as closed down today as might have been the case with the 1985 or 1989 vintages from Bruno Giacosa were at a similar age. But, these remain emphatically classically-structured Piedmontese wines and they are built for the long haul, so it simply makes sense to let them have their requisite twenty or twenty-five years out from the vintage to fully blossom and enjoy the wines once they arrive at their plateaus of peak maturity. For when they are ready to drink, there are no wines in Piemonte that surpass them!

*The following notes represent the bottles of Bruno Giacosa that I have had the pleasure to drink in the last handful of years, as I probably began planning this piece and amassing notes for this follow-up article four or five years ago now. They are simply listed chronologically, from most recent vintage to oldest that I have tasted, with only a bit of overlap from the notes that appeared in the original piece ten years ago.*

#### **2001 Barbaresco “Santo Stefano di Neive”- Bruno Giacosa**

I had not crossed paths with a bottle of 2001 Santo Stefano from Bruno Giacosa in at least five years, but, I was not surprised to see that this superb wine is still a solid decade away from blossoming. The still tight and promising nose offers up a complex blend of red and black cherries, road tar, gamebirds, woodsmoke, a great base of soil and a bit of new leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with impressive, nascent complexity, a rock solid core, firm, well-integrated tannins and stunning length and grip on the seamless and very youthful finish. This will be a brilliant wine in the fullness of time, but at least a solid decade’s worth of patience is really required before this wine starts to hit on all cylinders. 2022-2065+. **94+**.

#### **1999 Barolo “Rocche del Falletto ” Riserva- Bruno Giacosa**

The 1999 Barolo “Rocche del Falletto” Riserva from Bruno Giacosa is a brilliant example of this underrated and totally stunning year. The bouquet is still quite young, but also suave and blossoming, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of cherries, licorice, gamebirds, incipient notes of camphor, a gorgeously complex base of soil, coffee, fresh oregano, a touch of hazelnut and just a whisper of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and loaded with sweet fruit at the core, with impeccable focus and balance, firm, ripe and very well-integrated tannins and stunning length and grip on the young, but still, so promising finish. The refined style of the 1999 vintage should make this wine start to blossom around age twenty, but I would still be strongly inclined to not really start drinking it for at least another decade, as the real fireworks here will not begin until the wine is at least a quarter century old. All this brilliant wine needs is more bottle age! 2019-2060. **95**.

#### **1998 Barbaresco “Santo Stefano di Neive” Riserva- Bruno Giacosa**

As was the case with the 2001 white label Santo Stefano, it had been five years since I last saw a bottle of the ’98 Giacosa Riserva from this great vineyard. This wine is still too young for primetime drinking, but it is starting to get closer to its moment of blossoming, as it offers up a deep and complex nose of cherries, road tar, licorice, incipient notes of *sous bois*, fresh oregano and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with its

structural elements still producing a bit of youthful angularity that needs to be waited out. The wine is rock solid at the core, moderately tannic and quite tangy, with lovely focus and excellent length and grip on the backend. Five more years in the cellar may be enough for this wine to really start to drink with some generosity, but the real fireworks will not start for another dozen years or so. 2016-2040. **92+**.



*The Giacosa family's original parcels in the Asili vineyard in Barbaresco.*

#### **1996 Barbaresco “Asili di Barbaresco” Riserva- Bruno Giacosa**

I would never dream of opening one of my bottles of 1996 Asili Riserva from Bruno Giacosa right now, as the wine is still a good decade or two away from really blossoming, but when a friend generously served one, I was very, very happy to check in on the wine and see how it is progressing! The bouquet has started to stir nicely and now offers up a pure and complex blend of cherries, licorice, road tar, a gorgeous base of Asili's inimitable *terroir*, red curry, a touch of fennel seed and a gentle topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is very deep, full-bodied and tangy, with unmistakable profundity in its future. The core here is bottomless, the tannins are ripe and seamlessly integrated, and the focus and grip on the very, very long, perfectly balanced finish are haunting. This has been a legend in the making since it was released, and though it is still at least a dozen years away from really starting to drink with a bit of generosity, its inherent beauty is already very easy to read. Just be patient, as it will probably be a perfect wine when it is truly ready to drink! 2030-2100. **98+**.

#### **1990 Barbaresco Riserva- Bruno Giacosa**

This was the first time I had ever seen a bottling of Riserva simply labeled as Barbaresco from Bruno Giacosa, with no mention of a vineyard designation, so I have to assume that he decided to blend the production from a couple of different vineyards to make this cuvée in 1990. The wine in any case is young, complex and very promising, as it offers up a nose of cherries, a very discreet touch of anise, tar, violets, complex soil tones and surprisingly, an overt touch of

vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fairly full-bodied, deep and currently quite tarry in its adolescence, with tangy acids, very good, but not great mid-palate depth, and good length and grip on the finish. At this point the wine is still decidedly on the young side and still a bit pinched on the palate, but it should be quite good with another five to seven years of cellaring. It is in that slightly “dulled” period that many Giacosas go through at this stage, and I may well be underrating it a tad. 2012-2035+? **89+**?

**1990 Barbaresco “Santo Stefano di Neive” Riserva- Bruno Giacosa**

The 1990 Santo Stefano Riserva has continued to cruise along as if time will never touch it, and in the interim of two years since I wrote up my historical piece on Bruno Giacosa and last tasted the wine, it seems even younger than it did at that time (though it may well just be a reflection of this particularly youthful bottle). The bouquet remains, deep, pure and youthful, as it offers up scents of red cherries, woodsmoke, gamebirds, road tar, herbs, a great base of soil and a developing topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and complex, with fine mid-palate depth, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the finish. This still needs a few years more of cellaring before it really starts to hit on all cylinders. 2014-2050. **93+**.

**1989 Barolo “Falletto di Serralunga” Riserva- Bruno Giacosa**

The 1989 Falletto Riserva from Bruno Giacosa is one of the most beautiful and promising young bottles of Barolo that I have ever had the pleasure to taste. The wine is really still too young to be opening, but its potential is self-evident. The bouquet offers up an utterly beautiful, youthful constellation of cherries, anise, road tar, game, underbrush, a touch of bonfire, complex soil tones, camphor and a lovely topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep, nascently complex, with beautiful sappiness at the core, a glorious expression of *terroir*, firm, ripe tannins, tangy acids and an endless, palate-staining and impeccably balanced finish. This most recent bottle was paired up alongside the great 1989 Bartolo Mascarello Barolo, and this magical Giacosa wine came across as a bit more sappy and even more elegant than the Bartolo! A great, great wine in the making, but I would give it at least another five years in the cellar to allow the wine to more fully blossom, as it is still very early days for this legendary effort! 2022-2075. **98+**.

**1986 Barbaresco “Santo Stefano di Neive”- Bruno Giacosa**

1986 is a very underrated year for Piemonte, but I have had some absolutely delicious and completely *à point* examples of this vintage in the last few years, with the Giacosa white label Santo Stefano certainly amongst the most magical. The deep, pure and haunting bouquet soars from the glass in a beautiful meld of cherries, oranges, woodsmoke, anise, camphor, dried roses and an absolutely brilliant base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and wide open, with beautiful delineation, melting tannins, lovely acids and great length and grip on the complex and poised finish. Just a superb bottle of Santo Stefano at its absolute apogee. 2008-2025. **94**.

**1985 Barolo “Villero di Castiglione Falletto”- Bruno Giacosa**

As I noted in my first piece on *Signor* Giacosa, the inaugural vintage of the single vineyard bottling of Villero was in 1978, which was the only year where this wine was designated as a *Riserva* and wore a maroon label. Every subsequent vintage, up through the final Giacosa Villero bottling in 1996, was as white label bottling, including this stunning 1985

Villero. The wine is now just entering its plateau of maturity, having crossed the thirty year threshold of bottle age, and offers up a beautiful bouquet of cherries, licorice, gamebirds, gentle tariness, beef broth, a complex base of soil and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a rock solid core of sweet fruit, seamless, moderate tannins and impeccable focus and balance on the very long, tangy finish. The 1985 Villero still has decades of life ahead of it, but it is now drinking with great style and beauty. 2016-2040+. **94+**.

### **1982 Barbaresco “Gallina di Neive”- Bruno Giacosa**

The 1982 Gallina is another simply beautiful example of this vintage from Bruno Giacosa that remains a few years away from primetime drinking. The deep, complex nose jumps from the glass in a beautiful blend of cherries, orange zest, woodsmoke, spice tones, gentle notes of road tar, sandy, Neive soil tones and a bit of dried herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and pure, with a very youthful veneer, great transparency to the soil, still a fair bit of firm tannin and lovely tanginess on the long and complex finish. This is a pretty persuasive argument that one does not need to focus exclusively on the red label bottlings! 2012-2050. **93+**.

### **1982 Barbaresco “Santo Stefano di Neive” Riserva- Bruno Giacosa**

Of all the Bruno Giacosa wines that I have drunk down through the years, the 1982 Santa Stefano Riserva is the one that I have had the pleasure to drink the most often, as this was the very first wine I ever drunk and sold from the *Maestro* back in my early days in the wine trade. I was smart enough to buy it for my cellar back then, but naturally, I did not buy nearly enough, and I am now down to my last couple of bottles. The wine is now fully into its apogee, offering up a superb and very complex bouquet of cherries, lovely spice tones, gamebird, a touch of red curry, a glorious base of autumnal soil tones, fennel seed and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full and marvelously complex, with a great core of red fruit, superb transparency, melting tannins and a very, very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. A great wine at its peak, but with decades of life still ahead of it. 2016-2045+. **96**.

### **1982 Barolo “Falletto di Serralunga”- Bruno Giacosa**

The 1982 Falletto from Bruno Giacosa is still a fairly young wine and really deserves at least another four or five years of cellaring before one starts to open it with impunity. The bouquet is still just a tad primary, but deep, complex and vibrant in its mix of red and black cherries, tar, camphor, licorice, forest floor and a bit of meatiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and powerfully built, with a sappy core of cherry fruit, stunning soil inflection, ripe, moderate tannins, tangy acids and superb grip on the very, very long, transparent and palate-staining finish. A great white label in the making. 2012-2050. **94+**.

### **1978 Barbaresco “Gallina di Neive”- Bruno Giacosa**

The 1978 Barbaresco “Gallina” from Bruno Giacosa is a deep and still quite youthful example of the vintage. The blossoming nose offers up a complex and red fruity nose of cherries, orange peel, *sous bois*, dried herb tones, gamebirds, nutskins and a smoky topnote redolent of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with outstanding focus and balance, still a fair bit of well-integrated tannin to resolve, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. While this wine is certainly approachable today, its best drinking is still a few years in the future. A very elegant rendition of

Gallina from Bruno Giacosa- this is typically not the most elegant *terroir* from which he has worked in Neive! 2013-2040+. **93.**

#### **1974 Barbaresco “Santo Stefano di Neive”- Bruno Giacosa**

The 1974 Santo Stefano is fully mature and is drinking splendidly at age thirty-four. The deep and perfumed nose jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of cherries, orange zest, woodsmoke, oregano, a touch of nutskin, a great base of minerality and very gentle autumnal tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and complex, with great length and grip, just a touch of remaining tannin, tangy acids and wonderful focus and balance on the refined finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Barbaresco. 2008-2030+. **94.**

#### **1974 Barolo “Ginestra di Monforte”- Bruno Giacosa**

This is the first time that I can recall tasting a bottling from the Ginestra vineyard in Monforte d’Alba from Bruno Giacosa, and I am very grateful to the gentleman who brought this along as a backup to a tasting and then decided we might as well taste it- despite the fact that the first bottle he brought was showing beautifully. The nose is deep, complex and wide open in its blend of cherries, coffee, *sous bois*, camphor, bonfires, licorice and a gentle touch of nutskins in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with a great core of pure fruit, tangy acids, a superb signature of soil and outstanding length and grip on the modestly tannic and finely honed finish. A lovely wine. 2012-2035. **92.**



### **1971 Barbaresco “Montefico di Barbaresco”- Bruno Giacosa**

Bruno Giacosa only made wine from the beautiful Montefico vineyard in Barbaresco in the vintages of 1969, 1970 and 1971. This is one of my absolute favorite crus in the village of Barbaresco, as it delivers a great elegance and aromatic purity at its apogee that is hard to surpass. The 1971 Montefico from Giacosa is an absolutely monumental bottle of wine (despite its being designated with a “White Label”), as it soars from the glass in a very vibrant and stunningly complex blaze of red and black cherries, licorice, underbrush, gamebirds, camphor, blood orange, fresh oregano, nutskin, red curry and a touch of black truffle in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and stunning, with a great core of sappy fruit, still a fair bit of tannin to resolve, great acids, impeccable focus and balance and stunning length and grip on the still slightly chewy finish. While this is a delicious bottle of wine to drink now with sufficient decanting time, I would not hesitate to cellar it longer and allow the structural elements to slowly melt away. A great, great wine. 2010-2060. **95.**

### **1971 Barolo “Falletto di Serralunga” Riserva Speciale- Bruno Giacosa**

For more than twenty years, this was the most prized bottle of Barolo in my cellar, and it was very hard to open it when the time came for a special evening of Barolo and Barbaresco. But, the rest of the lineup that evening was so compelling that it was impossible not to include this bottle, and happily, the wine showed beautifully. The '71 Falletto Riserva Speciale was only the second cru bottling that Bruno Giacosa produced from this vineyard, with a 1970 white label bottling being the inaugural release. Back in this era, this was made from purchased grapes, as the family did not buy the vineyard here until 1982, and other than the 1970 and 1971, the only other vintage where this wine was produced from purchased grapes was in 1978. The 1971 Falletto Riserva Speciale is now at its peak of maturity, delivering a complex and utterly classic bouquet of red and black cherries, gentle tarry notes, forest floor, fennel seed, a touch of fresh oregano and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still rock solid at the core, with perfect maturity, melting tannins, bright acids and laser-like focus on the very, very long, complex and utterly classic finish. A great wine at its zenith. 2016-2045. **96.**

### **1970 Barbaresco “Montefico di Barbaresco”- Bruno Giacosa**

Bruno Giacosa certainly did nice work with the fruit from the Montefico vineyard that he sourced from 1969 to 1971. I love the wonderfully black fruity and soil-driven personality of Montefico in its youth and its superb underlying structure for aging, which has brought the 1970 from Giacosa to a marvelous peak of drinkability. The cru lies along the border with the neighboring town of Neive, with the Gallina vineyard of Neive lying immediately across the border from Montefico. At age forty the wine is now just coming into its zenith of maturity and is drinking magically well, but with impressive backend grip, *nervosité* and still a bit of tannin perking up the magically long finish. The bouquet is deep, complex and has now transitioned from black fruit to red fruit in its profile, as it offers up a superb mélange of cherries, orange peel, *sous bois*, a gentle bit of nutskins, woodsmoke, coffee, a touch of roasted gamebird and a brilliant base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, resolved and tangy, with a rock solid core of fruit, moderate tannins, magical focus and stunning length and grip on the beautifully complex finish. A simply stunning bottle with decades of life still in it. 2010-2030+. **94.**



### **1970 Barolo “Collina Rionda di Serralunga”- Bruno Giacosa**

The 1970 Collina Rionda is drinking magically and is perhaps the greatest example of the vintage that I have ever had the pleasure to taste. The bouquet is deep and utterly brilliant, as it soars from the glass in a beautiful mélange of cherries, orange zest, fennel seed, woodsmoke, *sous bois*, camphor, nutskins, lovely porcini tones and a bit of an exotic topnote redolent of salami. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, elegant and beautifully transparent, with an almost creamy texture to the mid-palate, melting tannins, stunning complexity and profound length and grip on the completely resolved finish. This is a completely resolved bottle of Barolo with decades of life still ahead of it from one of the greatest *terroirs* in Serralunga- it is a shame that Bruno Giacosa no longer makes wine from this magical vineyard. A great, great wine. 2008-2030. **95.**

### **1967 Barbaresco “Asili di Barbaresco” Riserva Speciale- Bruno Giacosa**

1967 was the first vintage that Bruno Giacosa produced a wine from the fabled vineyard of Asili, which was eventually followed by a wine produced from purchased fruit here again in 1990, 1993 and 1995. Finally, in early 1996, *Signore* Giacosa bought the small parcel from which the '93 and '95 had been sourced and this is now one of the prized vineyard holdings of the family estate. This particular bottle of the '67 Asili Riserva Speciale was my second bottle out of three that I luckily came across nearly ten years ago, with this second bottle having a better cork and the wine showing even more magically than the first one opened a couple of years earlier. The utterly brilliant bouquet is a haunting blend of cherries, blood orange, gamebird, magically complex soil tones, roses and a whisper of clove-like spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and utterly refined on the attack, with a sappy core of red fruit, bright, vibrant acids, great focus and a very, very long, elegant and perfectly balanced finish. This is a wine of exceptional complexity and elegance. 2016-2035+. **96.**

### **1964 Barbaresco “Santo Stefano di Neive” Riserva Speciale- Bruno Giacosa**

I have been fortunate to drink the magical 1964 Santa Stefano Riserva Speciale on a few occasions now and it remains one of the greatest bottles of wine that I have ever drunk in my lifetime! I was happy to learn fairly recently that Bruno Giacosa himself cites this wine as his very favorite of his career and I hope he still has a few in the cellar to enjoy these days! The wine remains absolutely profound aromatically, offering up a bouquet cherries, blood orange, *sous bois*, bonfire, a touch of autumn leaves, spit-roasted gamebirds, a superb base of iron-infused soil tones, a touch of anise, orange zest and rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and perfectly proportioned, with a great base of soil, a sappy core of sweet red fruit, brilliant focus and balance, fading tannins, tangy acids and a refined, magically complex and utterly seamless finish. It is a *tour de force* from beginning to end and a marvelous accomplishment. The wine continues to cruise along as if time will never touch it and remains as perfect today as the first time I tasted the wine nearly fifteen years ago! 2015-2040+. **100.**



## RECENTLY TASTED, SUPERB SPANISH WINES PART TWO



*Pergola-trained, hundred year-old Albariño vine at Cabaleiro do Val in Rías Baixas.*

I mentioned in the last issue that I had several cases of samples arrive from a couple of my very favorite importers of Spanish wines just before the last newsletter was sent out. Rather than further delay Issue 67, which was already a couple of weeks late and starting to push up against my scheduled knee surgery, it seemed much more logical to simply write a part two Spanish report. As I was also scheduled to do a speaking engagement on Spanish wines right before my surgery, a follow-up article on Spain also allowed me to incorporate notes on a couple of beautiful old Vega Sicilia Unicos that we served at the tasting. The old Vegas reminded me that I was supposed to have been sent a few samples from the winery for Issue 67 of the new releases from this iconic Ribera del Duero estate, so I circled back around to their distributor in New York, who kindly arranged for the team at Vega Sicilia to send along the samples. I was very pleased to have a chance to taste a few of the new releases from Vega Sicilia, as I had not seen any of their younger wines since the releases from the latter half of the 1990s and was really a bit out of the loop with how things have been progressing at this most famous estate. The

timing was good on another front as well, as my late-arriving samples in early March included the full lineup of new releases from another couple of my favorite producers in Ribera del Duero, Goyo García Viadero and Viña Pedrosa, and it was the height of enjoyment to be able to open wines from these outstanding producers side by side while preparing this article.

As I noted in the article in issue 67, this second part of Spanish coverage is anything but an afterthought, as it includes notes on yet another of my absolute, long-time favorite Spanish producers, Envínate, whose wines range across several D.O.s and are always of impeccable quality. The new releases of old vine bottlings from this dynamic young team of winemakers is outstanding across the board and will delight fans of their wines- for those of you who have not yet had a chance to try any wines from Envínate, time is a wasting! A new producer to me that also really stood out in the recent round of samples was 4 Monos Viticultores, who also work with old vines in a handful of vineyards up in the mountains of the Sierra de Gredos, eighty kilometers west of Madrid. 4 Monos is the brainchild of winemakers Javier García and Laura Robles, as well as wine lover David Velasco and vineyard owner David Moreno. The four partners started with the 2009 vintage and their current releases were all outstanding, with old vines, low octane and a gentle touch in the cellars all adding up to vibrant, energetic and soil-infused wines of great character and complexity. I cannot recommend them highly enough! Another new estate to me that should be singled out for praise from this round of samples was the winery of Alberto Redrado and Violeta Gutiérrez in the Alicante mountains, which they call Curii. Alberto Redrado is Wine Director and co-owner of the Michelin two-starred restaurant of l'Escaleta in Valencia, and Violeta Gutiérrez is the daughter of one of the top wine producers in the region, Felipe Gutiérrez de la Vega, whose personal specialty is dessert wines. The young couple produces an old vine Garnacha that is absolutely out of this world and will completely change perceptions of what is possible in the torrid region of Alicante.

In the last article, I made a mistake in my tasting note on one of my new favorite producers of Mencía in Ribeira Sacra, Divina Clementia, as I incorrectly attributed the fine winemaking here to Raúl Pérez, when in fact the winemaker at Divina Clementia is a gentleman named Raúl Suarez! It turns out that the two gentleman are good friends and Señor Suarez was very kind to drop me a note correcting me after the last issue was sent out. So, I include the tasting note on this superb wine again in this issue, with the correct winemaker attributed! Ironically, I also received a range of wines for this article from Raúl Pérez, who hails from Bierzo, but makes wines for several different estates throughout Galicia. As I had a chance to speak to a group in New York in early March about wines from the region of Galicia just after the last issue was sent out, I was of course delighted to be receiving more wines from the region to add to the article. At the tasting, I had a bit of a surprise, as a couple of my recent favorite white wines were served prior to dinner (an Albariño and a Godello), without any accompanying food, and I was really struck by how rather ordinary the wines seemed in this context. As I most often taste with a bit of food out alongside of the wines when I am not on the road, (this being the natural context in which most wines will be consumed) and I am always interested to see how food plays off of the wine in the glass (as well as helping to keep me sober through a long series of bottles!), I was a bit surprised with how the wines showed without any accompanying food on this particular evening. Interestingly, I noted that similar wines served with the first course of the dinner really stood out for their complexity and personality- performing much more as I had anticipated. I just mention this in passing, as I have never really emphasized how so

many of these wines are really “food wines” and are at their best at the table with the proper cuisine, but I will make sure that the next time I am speaking on the beautiful wines of Galicia, that I insist on a few *hors d’oeuvres* be circulated even during our tasting portion of the evening.

This feature on Spanish wines also includes a ton more notes on the wines of the Canary Islands, as I had not gotten through all of my samples from this beautiful volcanic island chain that were here in early March, and this fine backlog was augmented by a deep tasting organized by Sarah Gallaher, who is the Spanish wine specialist for one of the top wine distributors in New York. Sarah kindly devoted an afternoon of her time to sharing her extensive knowledge of the wines and various *terroirs* of the Canary Islands with me and my understanding of these beautiful wines grew exponentially as a result. This is one of the very few wine producing regions in the world to be planted exclusively on their own rootstocks, as phylloxera cannot grab a foothold in these volcanic soils and many of the vines are still grown in the ancient method of *Provignage*, with the canes simply bent and planted in neighboring soil from the “mother” vine as new vines are needed in the vineyards. I have been really starting to love these wines in the last several years, and after our tasting, a trip to these islands seems like something that must emphatically be done in the not too distant future, to visit some of these great, small producers and taste in their cellars. I am not sure if my recently repaired knee will be up for hiking the steep-pitched, volcanic slopes of the islands, but we shall see! Clearly, though the quantities are small, these are some of the most interesting Spanish wines out there in the market these days for lovers of unique, soil-inflected and low octane wines that simply sing at the table, and I will make every effort to better understand these wines and the beautiful *terroirs* that produce them in the near future! There are notes on dozens of highly recommended current releases from the islands in the pages that follow.

Another virtually new producer to me in this article is Laura Lorenzo, whose wines I had never tasted before this superb round of samples, with the exception of a lone wine from her last January. Laura is a native of Galicia, having been born and raised in the town of Allariz in the province of Ourense. She started studying oenology at the age of sixteen and after procuring her degree, she worked at a winery in Ribeira Sacra, as well as apprenticing with Eben Sadie in South Africa (many will argue this is the finest winery in the entire country) and Achaval Ferrer in Argentina. Returning to her roots in Ribeira Sacra, she was the head winemaker at Dominio de Bibei for a decade, before starting her own project, Daterra Viticultores in 2014. Naturally, she started her own winery in her beloved Ribeira Sacra, buying or renting parcels of old vines in several villages in the regions of Quiroga-Bibi and Amandi. Her winemaking is very non-interventionist, with indigenous yeast fermentations and aging in older casks. I was absolutely smitten by the superb quality and marvelous transparency of each and every wine that I tasted from her for this report and felt she deserved to be singled out in the introduction as a result. Yet another rising star in Ribeira Sacra!

The following wines have all been tasted in the last six weeks and for the most part, represent the current releases from some of my favorite producers in Spain, as well as a couple of recent notes on Portuguese wines that I came across in my tasting books that I had missed in the preparation of the last article. With new releases from folks like López de Heredia, Bodegas Akutain and Bodegas Lecea in Rioja, Vega Sicilia, Viña Pedrosa and Goyo Garcia Viadero in Ribera del Duero and Guímaro and Envínate in Ribeira Sacra, this is hardly a report on the

“second stringers” of Spain and there are some absolutely amazing wines featured in the pages below.

### **Cava**

#### **2013 Bermejo “Espumoso” Brut Nature (Lanzarote)**

The 2013 Bermejo “Espumoso” Brut Nature is made by the *Methode Champenoise* entirely from Malvasia and is aged eighteen months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine offers up a really complex and classy bouquet of apple, fresh-baked bread, lovely minerality, a touch of ocean breeze and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and good length and grip on the finish. This is bone dry and I would not mind it with just a touch of *dosage* to carry the fruit all the way to the finish line on the palate, but that is just me. 2017-2025+. **87.**

#### **2014 Bermejo “Espumoso” Brut Nature Rosado (Lanzarote)**

The 2014 Bermejo “Espumoso” Brut Nature Rosado is composed entirely of Listán Negro, which is gently pressed to give the wine its pale salmon hue. It is made by the *Methode Champenoise* and is aged fifteen months on its fine lees prior to disgorgement and bottling. Again, this is a Brut Nature and sees no *dosage*. The wine delivers superb aromatic delicacy and precision, wafting from the glass in a mix of tangerine, smoke, dried flowers, ocean breeze and a nice base of sandy soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a good core, small bubbles and good length and grip on the snappy and long finish. The wine closes with just a whisper of Listán Negro’s botanicals, which really works nicely at the table. Good juice. 2017-2025+. **88+.**

#### **2013 Suriol Brut Nature Reserva (Cataluña) Disgorged October 2016**

The 2013 Suriol Brut Nature Reserva is composed of a blend of forty percent Macabeo and thirty percent each of Xarel-lo and Parellada, with the wine fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and undergoing malo in cement tanks prior to bottling and aging *sur latte* for a minimum of two and a half years. The 2013 offers up a fine bouquet of tart pear, lemon peel, salty soil tones, bread dough and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very mineral-driven, with a good core, brisk acids, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the still youthful finish. Lovely Cava. 2017-2030. **89.**

#### **2013 Suriol Brut Nature Rosat Reserva (Cataluña)**

The 2013 Suriol Brut Nature Rosat Reserva is made of a blend of Monastrell and Garnacha, with the lovely salmon color coming from six hours of skin contact. The wine is fermented in cement and spends twenty-four months aging *sur latte*. The bouquet of the 2013 wafts from the glass in a blend of strawberries, blood orange, salty soil tones, rye bread and a touch of dried rose petals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, bright acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is loaded with personality from its blend of grapes. 2017-2027. **89+.**

### **Albariño- Rías Baixas**

#### **2015 Albariño “Igrexario de Saiar”- Benito Santos (Val do Salnés)**

The 2015 Albariño “Igrexario de Saiar” from Benito Santos is fermented with indigenous yeasts and spends a few months aging on its fine lees prior to bottling. The wine offers up a deep and gently leesy nose of tart pear, bread fruit, straw, salty soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and rock solid at the core, with good complexity, bright acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This seems to lack just a bit of

vibrancy *vis à vis* the top producers in the region, but it is a good solid example nonetheless. 2017-2022. 87.

#### **2015 Albariño- Adega Pedralonga**

The Albariño from Francisco Alfonso's Adega Pedralonga is produced from thirty-three year-old vines that Señor Alfonso planted on a granitic hillside ten miles in from the Atlantic Ocean. The vines have always been farmed organically and starting in 2007, Francisco's son Miguel began converting the vineyards over to biodynamic viticulture. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and ages for twelve to eighteen months on its fine lees prior to bottling. The 2015 offers up a deep and serious nose of white peach, gentle leesiness, a touch of beeswax, wet stone minerality, lime peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely minerality and impressive length and grip on the bright and focused finish. High class Albariño! 2017-2030. 91+.



#### **2015 Albariño “Dandelión”- Bodegas Alberto Nanclares (Cambados- Rías Biaxas)**

The Dandelión bottling of Albariño from Alberto Nanclares is his *village wine*, made from a blend of different vineyards (aged thirty to sixty years old) scattered around Cambados. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and spends a year on its fine lees prior to bottling. The 2015 Dandelión offers up a superb bouquet of lemon, sea salts, granitic minerality, a touch of Chablis-like straw and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied



and nascently complex, with a fine core, great backend mineral drive and a long, racy and perfectly balanced finish. This is high class Albariño that is built for the cellar and just starting its journey. It will be drinking even better a few years down the road today, and it is quite delicious at the present time! 2017-2030. **91+**.

**2015 Albariño- Bodegas Alberto Nanclares (Cambados- Rías Bixas)**

The eponymous bottling of Albariño from Alberto Nanclares is also produced from vines ranging from thirty to sixty years of age, but there are only five parcels utilized for this cuvée, all located in the same small parish. The wine is raised differently than the Dandelión, as half the cuvée is fermented in stainless and half in two thousand liter, old *foudre*, with the time spent on the fine less for this bottling more than a year. The 2015 Nanclares bottling offers up a superb aromatic blend of fresh lime, tart pear, ocean breeze, complex, salty soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip and outstanding backend energy on the still youthful and very, very long finish. The time spent in old *foudre* gives the wine a rounder palate impression than in the Dandelión, without sacrificing any of the cut and race of classical Albariño. 2018-2030. **92+**.

**2015 Albariño “Soverribas”- Bodegas Alberto Nanclares (Cambados- Rías Bixas)**

The Soverribas bottling hails from a single small vineyard in the village of Meaño, planted on clay and granite, and this cuvée is fermented and raised in a twenty-two hundred liter, ten year-old *foudre*, with indigenous yeast fermentation and a full year on its fine lees prior to bottling. The 2015 Soverribas is the deepest and most complex of these three excellent Albariños from Señor Nanclares, offering up a fine bouquet of bread fruit, tart pear, complex soil tones, gentle leesiness, a touch of fresh almond, ocean breeze and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, zesty and beautifully complex, with a great core, fine focus and grip and a very long, perfectly balanced and very intensely flavored finish. This is extremely easy to drink today, but it is still a puppy and a handful of years in the cellar are going to work their magic and produce a reference point bottle of Albariño! Can I order my clams now? 2017-2035. **94**.

**2015 Albariño “Paraje Mina”- Bodegas Alberto Nanclares (Cambados- Rías Bixas)**

The Paraje Mina bottling from Alberto Nanclares is one that I had not tasted previously, so perhaps this is a new single vineyard Albariño from this fine, fine winemaker. In any event, the 2015 is barrel-fermented in seven year-old, five hundred liter casks and is outstanding on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet soaring from the glass in a blaze of fresh lime, tart pineapple, beautiful, salty minerality, a touch of menthol and just a whisper of leesiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a lovely briny minerality, excellent focus and grip, zesty acids and outstanding balance on the very, very long and classy finish. Despite its having been barrel-fermented, it shows absolutely no signs of wood. This is a quintessential middleweight that is light on its feet, but resonates with vibrancy and breed. 2017-2025. **92**.

**2015 Albariño “Cinerea”- Bodegas Alberto Nanclares (Val do Salnés)**

The Cinerea bottling from Alberto Nanclares is a single vineyard that lies in the village of Finca Mina in the Val de Salnés, with granitic soils and is planted to thirty year-old vines. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and aged in two to three year-old French casks for nine months on its fine lees, prior to bottling. The 2015 is the first vintage of Cinerea that I have tasted from Señor Nanclares and it is brilliant, delivering a complex and vibrant bouquet of sweet grapefruit, fresh pineapple, stony minerality, dried flowers, gentle leesy tones and a very discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, nicely ripe and full, with a super core,

excellent complexity and a very long, very refined and zesty finish. The sojourn in cask has given this wine a rounder palate impression than most Albariños, but the wine still has plenty of acidity, length and grip and is absolutely a pleasure to drink. Purists like my friend Gerry Dawes would not be impressed, but I love this wine as another distinct, but exceptional expression of Albariño! 2017-2025+. **93+**.

**2015 Albariño “Coccinella” Cepas Velhas- Bodegas Alberto Nanclares (Cambados)**

In my experience, Coccinella is the very greatest of the great lineup of Albariño from Alberto Nanclares and the 2015 is absolutely stellar. As readers may recall, this is produced from one hundred year-old vines planted in sandy soils that have allowed the vines to be on their own rootstocks, as phylloxera cannot get a hold in the sand here. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in old, four hundred liter casks and spend a year aging on its fine lees prior to bottling. The bouquet is pure, complex and classy, offering up scents of fresh lime, green apple, beautiful soil tones, spring flowers, gentle notes of menthol, a touch of ocean breeze and just a whisper of vanillin oak from the older casks. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a great core of old vine fruit, superb minerality, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the vibrant and perfectly balanced finish. Great Albariño! 2017-2030. **95**.

**2015 Albariño “Sketch”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Rías Baixas)**

The 2015 Albariño “Sketch” from Raúl Pérez hails from a forty-plus year-old vineyard that he picks late. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeast and allowed to nurture on its fine lees for a year in fourteen year-old Burgundy barrels prior to bottling. The 2015 Sketch is excellent, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of tart orange, lime, lovely leesy tones, a touch of fresh almond, wet stone minerality, ocean breeze and a whisper of vanillin oak (from the fourteen year-old barrels!) in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely mineral drive, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, well-balanced and complex finish. Fine juice. 2017-2025. **92**.

***Ribeiro Blanco***

**2015 La Flor y la Abeja (The Flower and the Bee) Treixadura- Gomariz**

The 2015 La Flor y la Abeja Treixadura from Gomariz is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel. The wine offers up a refined and complex bouquet of lime, salty minerality, a touch of green olive, dried flowers and just a hint of rosemary in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully focused, with bright acids, lovely mid-palate depth and excellent length and grip on the complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is a lovely and serious example of Treixadura. 2017-2025+. **91**.

**2015 Albariño “X”- Gomariz**

The 2015 Albariño “X” from Gomariz includes five percent Treixadura in the blend, with the wine spending some extended *elevage* on its fine lees prior to bottling. The 2015 offers up a fine and vibrant nose of sweet grapefruit, lime peel, lovely minerality, gentle leesy tones and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip, snappy acids and fine mineral drive on the long and still quite youthful finish. This really could do with a year or two in the cellar to blossom. Fine juice. 2019-2030. **91+**.

**2014 Viña de Martín “Os Pasás”- Luis Rodríguez Vazquez**

The Os Pasás bottling from Luis Rodríguez is composed primarily of Treixadura, with supporting roles played in the blend by Albariño, Lado and Torrentés. The wine is fermented with wild yeasts in stainless steel and spend ten months aging on its fine lees. The 2014 Os Pasás



is a beautiful wine on both the nose and palate, with the complex bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of melon, peach, incipient notes of beeswax, flinty minerality and a topnote of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and minerally, with a fine core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance and a very long, classy finish. This is one of the entry level wines from Señor Rodríguez, but is also seriously complex and delicious! 2017-2025. **91.**

**2013 A Teixeira- Luis Rodríguez Vazquez**

As readers may recall, this primarily Treixadura bottling now includes a bit of Albariño and Godello in the last few vintages (it was all Treixadura in 2011, or I got my information incorrect), which is fermented and aged in *foudres* for a year prior to bottling. Like all of Luis Rodríguez's wines, it is fermented with natural yeasts. The 2013 A Teixeira is a cool customer, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and offering up a complex and vibrant bouquet of lemon, pear, incipient notes of beeswax, a beautiful base of soil, a hint of the butter to come and a delicate topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, crisp and full, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, a youthful girdle of acidity and outstanding length and grip on the detailed and vibrant finish. This is still a young wine and could do with a bit more bottle age to really blossom, but it is already pretty easy to finish the bottle! I know the comparison does not make a lot of sense, but this reminds me strongly of the old Château Montelena chardonnays of the late 1970s and early 1980s! A lovely bottle. 2017-2030. **92+.**

**2011 Viña de Martín "Escolma"- Luis Rodríguez Vazquez**

The 2011 Escolma from Luis Rodríguez is excellent and at six years of age it is nicely into its plateau of maturity and drinking with exceptional generosity and breed. The bouquet offers up a fine mélange of pear, a touch of pineapple, beeswax, salty soil tones, just a touch of vanillin oak, candied lemon peel and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, complex and full, with superb depth at the core, fine soil signature, bright, zesty acids and impeccable balance on the long, focused and vibrant finish. This is primarily composed of very old vine Treixadura, with a bit of Albariño, Torrentés and Lado also planted in the vineyard here. Fine, fine juice! 2017-2025+. **94.**

***Ribeiro Tinto***

**2015 La Flor y la Abeja (The Flower and the Bee) Souson- Gomariz**

The 2015 Souson from La Flor y la Abeja is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel and offers up a juicy bouquet of sweet blackberries, a touch of tree bark, gentle notes of pepper, coffee grounds and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with moderate tannins, bright acids and very good length and grip on the vibrant finish. This is quite approachable out of the blocks, but will be even better with a year or two in the cellar. A fine value. 2018-2030+. **89.**

**2014 Eidos Ermos- Luis Rodríguez Vazquez**

The Eidos Ermos bottling from Luis Rodríguez is a young vine blend of Ribeiro's indigenous varieties of Souson, Caiño, Brancellao and Ferrol, with Señor Rodríguez having planted these vineyards himself with *selection massale* cuttings from some of the old vines he farms in the region. The wine is fermented in stainless steel with indigenous yeasts and raised in a fifty-fifty combination of very old French casks and stainless tanks. The 2014 Eidos Ermos comes in at a cool twelve percent octane and jumps from the glass like a lightning bolt, offering up a complex blend of black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of coffee grounds, chicory, bonfire, grilled meats and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core, great soil signature and impeccable focus and grip on the long,

modestly tannic and vibrant finish. I really like the Montepulciano-like botanicals and just a hint of backend bitterness here that recalls the wines of Emidio Pepe a bit, albeit this is far less ripe in 2014 than any vintage of Emidio Pepe's that I have tasted. Folks that are put off by moderately ripe wines may find this a touch lean, but I absolutely love it and it really shines at the table! To my palate it tastes a bit like a low octane blend of Gevrey-Chambertin and Bandol. 2017-2035. **90.**



### **2011 A Torna dos Pasás “Escolma”- Luis Rodríguez Vazquez**

The 2011 A Torna dos Pasás “Escolma” from Luis Rodríguez is pure magic, with the wine delivering a superbly complex and wide open bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar ash, beautiful minerality, a touch of balsam bough, dark chocolate, just a whisper of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, very pure and light on its feet, with a superb core of fruit, stunning backend energy and grip, ripe, suave tannins and a very long, complex and utterly refined finish. Readers may recall that this is a field blend of Caiño, Brancellao and Ferrol, from Señor Rodríguez’s oldest, lowest-yielding vines on his steep, granitic slopes. The wine is barrel-fermented and sees just a touch of new wood during its twelve months of *elevage* and then spends fully three years in the cellar after bottling prior to release. This is a more than worthy follow-up to the brilliant 2010 Escolma that I tasted last year. As I said a year ago, this is simply one of Spain’s greatest red wines! 2017-2045. **94+.**

### ***Ribeira Sacra Blanco***

#### **2014 Godello- Val da Lenda (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)**

Victor Rodríguez is equally adept with Godello as he is with Mencía and this is one excellent bottle of wine. The bouquet is still on the young side, but offers up lovely purity in its bright mix of pear, lemon peel, slate, spring flowers and the first hints of the beeswax to come with further aging. On the palate the wine is focused, bright and nascently complex, with good weight and backend amplitude. The acids are vibrant, the balance is very fine and the wine is long and poised on the finish. This is high class Godello that is a very satisfying glass of wine today, but will be even better with some time in the cellar. 2017-2027. **92+**.

### ***Ribeira Sacra Tinto***

#### **2015 Mencía- Adega Algueira (Doade- Ribeira Sacra)**

Adega Algueira makes absolutely splendid Mencía, and their “regular” bottling is not to be ignored in the fine 2015 vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and classically-inclined, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, pomegranate, coffee grounds, slate soil tones, cigar smoke and hints of the tree bark to come. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, modest tannins and a long, ripe and focused finish. This will add layers of complexity with bottle age, but it is so cunningly balanced out of the blocks that it is already very, very easy to drink! 2017-2040. **91**.

#### **2015 Mencía “A Boca do Demo”- Castro Candaz (Chantada-Ribeira Sacra)**

Castro Candaz is a new project of Raúl Pérez and Rodri Méndez, which is focused on the Chantada region of Ribeira Sacra. This area features more gentle slopes up from the Sil River, cooler microclimates and far more granite than slate in the underlying soil. Their single vineyard bottling of A Boca do Demo hails from a vineyard planted in 1950 and includes the customary field blend of Trousseau and Garnacha Tintorera, as well as the dominant Mencía. The wine is fermented with whole clusters and aged in older casks prior to bottling. The 2015 A Boca do Demo delivers a fine, youthfully complex bouquet of pepper, dark berries, pomegranate, a touch of botanicals, stony minerality and a topnote of graphite. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely transparent, with a peppery personality that very much recalls the northern Rhône. There is good depth at the core here, but this is a wine that will revel in its minerality as it has time to blossom from behind its fine structural harness of ripe tannins, bright acids and significant backend grip. It is an excellent young Ribeira Sacra, with cool fruit tones and loads of mineral personality, but it will need some bottle age to blossom properly. 2022-2050+. **93**.

#### **2015 Portela do Vento- Daterra Viticultores- Laura Lorenzo (Quiroga-Bibeí)**

Quiroga-Bibeí is the most southeasterly of the five major sub-zones of Ribeira Sacra, with the dominant stone in these steep hillsides granite, rather than slate. Laura Lorenzo is a very talented young winemaker, who has worked at wineries as far abroad as the superb Eben Sadie in South Africa and was most recently the head winemaker at Dominio de Bibeí for a decade in Ribeira Sacra. 2015 Portela do Vento is composed of a blend of ninety percent Mencía and ten percent Garnacha Tintorera (Alicante Bouschet) and offers up a superb bouquet of sweet dark berries, pomegranate, graphite, granitic minerality and a touch of espresso. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and beautifully light on its feet, with a fine core, excellent complexity and a long, poised and gently tannic finish. This is really a lovely bottle that is already drinking with style and grace and will only get better with a bit of bottle age. Not bad for an “entry level” wine from Laura Lorenzo! 2017-2035. **90+**.

**2015 Mencía Lousas “Viñas de Aldea”- Envínate (Amandi-Ribeira Sacra)**

The 2015 Viñas de Aldea (their blended Ribeira Sacra bottling, from several different parcels, all of which are at least sixty years of age) from Envínate is outstanding, offering up a deep and nascently complex bouquet of dark berries, espresso, graphite, a touch of tree bark, fresh herbs, young Hermitage-like medicinal tones, plenty of smokiness and a superb base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, tightly-knit and rock solid at the core, with a full-bodied format, moderate, ripe tannins, bright acids and excellent mineral drive on the long, focused finish. This is a beautiful bottle in the making, but it will need some bottle age to blossom and is destined for a long life. 2020-2055. **92+**.

**2015 Mencía Lousas “Parcela Camiño Novo” – Envínate (Amandi-Ribeira Sacra)**

As readers may recall, the Parcela Camiño Novo is planted with vines that are more than seventy years of age and are a field blend of approximately ninety percent Mencía and ten percent Garnacha Tintorera. This is a beautifully situated vineyard, perched high above the Sil River and is owned by Pablo González, and the 2015 is vinified by both the team at Envínate and Miguel Anxo. The 2015 Parcela Camiño Novo is a great young bottle of Ribeira Sacra, delivering a complex aromatic constellation of pomegranate, sweet dark berries, tree bark, dark soil tones, graphite, a touch of grilled meats and a gently medicinal topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, superb soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, soil-driven and perfectly balanced finish. Superb juice in the making, but give it a bit of time in the cellar to blossom. 2021-2060. **94**.

**2015 Mencía Lousas “Parcela Seoane”- Envínate (Amandi-Ribeira Sacra)**

Envínate’s 2015 Mencía Lousas “Parcela Seoane” is young, deep, tight and very promising. The bouquet from this very old vine cuvée is bottomless, but still very primary, offering up scents of cassis, hints of the pomegranate to come with bottle age, tree bark, graphite, espresso, slate minerality, a touch of cola, gentle botanicals and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, transparent and full-bodied, with firm, ripe tannins, excellent focus and grip, tangy acids and great length on the nascently complex finish. This will probably eclipse the 2014 version in the fullness of time, but it will be several years before this superb wine starts to drink with any of its secondary layers of complexity showing! 2023-2060+. **95**.

**2015 Tinto Rústico “Miñato da Raña”- Bodegas Alberto Nanclares (Ribeira Sacra)**

As I wondered last year, I am not sure why the label does not state that this is a wine from Ribeira Sacra, hypothesizing that it is because Señor Nanclares' cellar lie in the town of Cambados in Rías Baixas? The Miñato de Raña “Tinto Rústico” is composed from a blend of sixty percent Mencía, thirty percent Garnacha and ten percent unknown grapes, sourced from steep, terraced granite vineyards on the Miño River. The 2015 version is just superb, as the fine ripeness of the vintage has really worked here, with the deep and sappy bouquet offering up scents of sweet dark berries, pomegranate, graphite, espresso, superb minerality and coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with great depth in the mid-palate, moderate, ripe tannins, good acids and great backend soil signature on the very, very long and classy finish. This is even a step up from the outstanding 2014 version! 2020-2050+. **94**.

**2015 El Pecado- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Doade- Ribeira Sacra)**

The El Pecado bottling from Raúl Pérez is produced primarily from Mencía, but the vineyard that this bottling hails from, the superb Finca Capeliños owned by Guímaro, is planted with a ninety-five year-old field blend that also includes small percentages of Bastardo, Garnacha Tintorera, Caiño and Brancellao. The wine is fermented with forty percent whole

clusters, with a long maceration of forty-five days and a year's *elevage* in older French barrels. The 2015 El Pecado offers up a fine and ripe bouquet of blackberries, pomegranate, a touch of tree bark, stony soil tones, woodsmoke and espresso. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core, fine-grained tannins and a long, still fairly primary finish. This is approachable today, but could really use three or four years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers to emerge, and it could well be that once this wine has a chance to stretch its wings with bottle age, my score will prove a bit conservative. Fine juice. 2017-2040+. **92+**.

**2015 La Penitencia- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Doade- Ribeira Sacra)**

The La Penitencia bottling from Raúl Pérez also hails from a vineyard owned by Guímaro, the Finca Pombeiras, which is planted with vines more than seventy years of age. Señor Pérez ferments this wine with all of the stems and raises the wine in older French casks for a year prior to bottling. The 2015 La Penitencia wafts from the glass in a deep and nascently complex nose of cassis, pomegranate, graphite, superb slate minerality, coffee grounds, cigar smoke, just a whisper of cedar and a touch of Ribeira Sacra botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch more precise than the El Pecado out of the blocks, with a fine core, excellent delineation, fine-grained tannins and a long, slate-infused and nascently complex finish. This is going to be outstanding! 2020-2040+. **93+**.

**2014 Merenzao- Adega Algueira (Doade- Ribeira Sacra)**

The 2014 Merenzao from Adega Algueira is absolutely stunning, soaring from the glass in a bright and complex aromatic constellation of cherries, blood orange, gamebird, gentle spice tones, incipient notes of forest floor, a touch of brown butter and a discreet topnote of balsam bough. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, transparent and very light on its feet, with a nice touch of sappiness at the core, moderate tannins and a very long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. There is that nice touch of backend bitterness on the close of the finish here that is so typical of this grape and works beautifully at table. This is a flat out beautiful bottle of wine, without the touch of volatility that one so often finds in the top examples of Trousseau from the Jura. 2017-2040. **93+**.

**2014 Mencía Lousas “Viñas de Aldea”- Envínate (Amandi-Ribeira Sacra)**

Aldea means “village” in Gallego, so this is the new name for Envínate’s “*Villages*” bottling from Ribeira Sacra. This is a blend of several different vineyards, with a minimum vineyard age of sixty years of age, with probably ninety-five percent of the blend comprised of Mencía (and the other five percent the usual suspects of a field blend in the region). The 2014 Viñas de Aldea is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex bouquet of cassis, pomegranate, slate, graphite, tree bark, coffee grounds and a hint of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and suave on the attack, with a very good core, fine soil signature, bright acids, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the still youthful finish. This is eminently drinkable today, but will be so much better with another four or five years in the cellar. 2020-2045+. **91+**.

**2014 Mencía Lousas “Parcela Camiño Novo”- Envínate (Amandi-Ribeira Sacra)**

The 2014 Parcela Camiño Novo from Envínate is every bit as fine as the 2015 version, albeit, clearly based in a different growing season. These seventy-plus year-old vines have turned out a beautiful wine in 2014, offering up a complex and very refined bouquet of cassis, chicory, just a touch of pomegranate, woodsmoke, a beautiful base of slate minerality, graphite, gentle botanicals and coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very intensely

flavored, with a rock solid core, great transparency, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and tangy finish. This does not have the puppy fat fruit of the 2015, but it is every bit as deep and its potential is at least as superb! 2021-2055+. **94.**

**2014 Mencía Lousas “Parcela Seoane”- Envínate (Amandi-Ribeira Sacra)**

The 2014 Mencía Lousas “Parcela Seoane” from Envínate is made from even older vines, with all of these over eighty years of age and perhaps even older, planted on pure slate in the Doade heart of Amandi. The 2014 version is brilliant, soaring from the glass in a youthfully complex mix of pomegranate, sweet dark berries, slate minerality, a touch of licorice, tree bark, graphite and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, soil-driven and full-bodied, with beautiful focus and delineation, a lovely core of fruit, stunning complexity and a very, very long, poised and focused finish. This is brilliant wine that is approachable today, due to seamless balance, but really is still a young wine and will be a legend in the fullness of time. 2020-2060. **95+.**

**2014 Mencía “Finca Pombeiras”- Guímaro (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)**

The Finca Pombeiras is a small, half hectare parcel of seventy-plus year-old vines that sits up high on the terraces above the Sil River. The very talented proprietor, Pedro Rodríguez uses all whole clusters for this bottling, which is foot-trodden and raised in old, five hundred liter casks. The 2014 Finca Pombeiras is truly outstanding, offering up a deep and very complex nose of sweet cassis, pomegranate, grilled meats, graphite, slate, espresso and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, great soil signature, modest tannins, vibrant acids and superb length and grip on the poised, tangy and light on its feet finish. This is every bit as fine as the stunning 2013 version! It is approachable today, but to really capture all of the magic here, one should give it at least a handful of years in the cellar- not that it is going to be an easy thing to keep one’s hands off of bottles of this beautiful wine! 2020-2050. **95.**

**2014 Mencía “Finca Meixemán”- Guímaro (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)**

The 2014 Finca Meixemán” from Guímaro is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex mélange of sweet dark berries, slate minerality, cigar smoke, pomegranate, tree bark and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full and complex, with superb soil signature, fine-grained tannins, excellent focus and balance and a long, refined and intensely flavored finish. These are seventy year-old Mencía vines, which are foot-trodden and raised in old French casks for twelve to fifteen months prior to bottling. Fine, fine juice. 2017-2040. **94.**

**2014 Azos de Pobo- Datterra Viticultores- Laura Lorenzo (Quiroga-Bibeí)**

The Azos de Pobo from Laura Lorenzo is made up of a field blend of ancient vines, ranging from eight to one hundred and twenty years of age. The blend is half Grand Negro and Garnacha Tintorera, with the balance including (probably) Mencía, Mouraton, Merenzao and other grapes. The grapes are destemmed and foot-trodden, barrel-fermented and then raised in older French casks. The 2014 Azos de Pobo is a superb young wine, wafting from the glass in a precise and classy constellation of sweet dark berries, espresso, beautifully complex soil tones, a touch of Alicante Bouschet’s autumnal leafiness, chicory and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with a fine, sappy core, lovely soil signature, suave, well-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This is a beautifully crafted wine that has just a hint of wildness on the backend today and which augurs very, very well for its future complexity. It is drinkable out of the blocks, but it is still primary and really deserves some bottle age to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. 2021-2045+. **93.**





*Laura Lorenzo of Daterra Viticultores in her cellars in the Val do Bibei.*

### **2013 Mencía “Pizarra”- Adega Algueira (Doado- Ribeira Sacra)**

As readers may recall, the Pizarra bottling of Mencía from Adega Algueira hails from eighty-plus year-old vines, from one of their vineyards that tower over the Sil River and face due south. The grapes are foot-trodden and fermented and aged in old, six hundred liter casks. The 2013 Pizarra is a stunning young bottle of Mencía, with the nose soaring from the glass in a nascently complex mix of sweet dark berries, pomegranate, tree bark, beautiful slate soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and soil-driven, with a sappy core of fruit, ripe, seamless tannins, excellent acids and outstanding length and grip on the youthfully complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is already very easy to drink, but it is a puppy and really deserves four or five years in the cellar to completely blossom. It is one of the reference point bottlings of Ribeira Sacra Mencía from the 2013 vintage. 2020-2050. **94.**

### **2013 Mencía- Divina Clementia (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)**

The 2013 Mencía from Divina Clementia is only the second wine produced from this new, boutique estate in Ribeira Sacra. The vines for this bottling hail from two small plots of vines, ranging from sixty to eighty years of age. As 2012 was the very first vintage produced here, the wine was a bit marked by its new wood (as one needs to buy casks to make wine!), but this is emphatically not the case with the 2013, which is superb and utterly classical in style. The bouquet is deep, complex and very classy, offering up scents of dark berries, pomegranate, fresh herb tones, slate, graphite, woodsmoke and a touch of nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and impeccably balanced, with a lovely core, great soil signature, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, suavely-tannic and vibrant finish. This is already drinking with



great style and breed, but will continue to improve for several decades. Congratulations to Raul Suarez and his team for turning out a stunning bottle of Mencía in only the second vintage here! 2017-2045+. **93+**.

**2013 Mencía “Finca Capeliños”- Guímaro (Amandi- Ribeira Sacra)**

Finca Capeliños is the oldest parcel of vines that the Rodríguez family owns, as these are ninety-five year-old vines in this sixty *ares* parcel that lies down towards the bottom of the slope, near the Sil River. The wine includes forty percent whole clusters, is foot-trodden and again, raised in older French barrels. The 2013 is blossoming beautifully since I last saw a bottle a year and a half ago, offering up a deep and sappy nose of blackberries, cassis, tree bark, a bit of grilled meat, cigar smoke, a very complex base of soil tones, graphite and a gentle touch of herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and beautifully balanced, with its full-bodied format impressively light on its feet, with modest tannins, a sappy core, tangy acids and simply outstanding length and grip on the complex finish. This is really starting to drink with verve, but it will age long and gracefully and there is absolutely no rush to start opening bottles anytime soon! A great bottle of Mencía! 2017-2040. **95**.

**2013 Ora et Labora Mencía- Roberto Regal (Ribeira Sacra- Miño River)**

This is made from a tiny parcel of old vines owned by Father Mario Vázquez that had long been in his family, and which are now farmed by the young winemaking dynamo, Roberto Regal. The steep slate slope that houses this vineyard overlooks the small village of Belesar, perched right on the Miño River. The wine is aging beautifully, as it offers up a pure, black fruity and youthfully complex blend of dark berries, cassis, chicory, a touch of tree bark, a fine base of slate and a classically smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very intensely flavored, with lovely transparency and bounce, modest tannins and a very, very long, poised and complex finish. This is a terrific wine that is already drinking with great style, but will have no difficulties aging at least a couple more decades, and probably longer! 2017-2035+. **93**.

***Cangas- Asturias***

**2015 Albarín Blanco “Viña Grandiella”- Monasterio de Corias (Cangas- Asturias)**

The Viña Grandiella bottling from Monasterio de Corias is made from fifty-plus year-old Albarín Blanco vines grown on slate hillside vineyards. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and aged for a few months on its fine lees prior to bottling. The 2015 “Viña Grandiella” offers up a fine and gently perfumed nose of casaba melon, pear, a touch of green olive, lime blossoms, slate and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, vibrant and full, with a good core, lovely slate mineral drive, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the complex, authoritative and very nicely balanced finish. A lovely bottle. 2017-2025+. **90**.

**2015 Mencía- Albarín Negro “Novicio”- Monasterio de Corias (Cangas- Asturias)**

The 2015 “Novicio” from Monasterio de Corias is a low octane (twelve percent) and zesty red that offers up plenty of personality on both the nose and palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of red berries, pomegranate, fresh herb tones, slate and graphite. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and tangy, with respectable depth at the core, fine intensity of flavor and a long, bouncy and succulent finish. This is really well-balanced, and though it is not the most complex of wines, it is eminently quaffable and a pleasure in the glass. 2017-2025+. **88**.

**2012 Finca los Frailes- Monasterio de Corias (Cangas- Asturias)**

The 2012 Finca los Frailes from Monasterio de Corias has blossomed nicely over the last year and now offers up a beautifully complex nose of black cherries, pomegranate, dark chocolate, a bit of bonfire, graphite, lovely spice tones, a hint of red curry and a fine base of soil.

On the palate the wine is full-bodied, transparent and light on its feet, with a good core, modest tannins, tangy acids and a nice touch of bitterness on the long and complex finish. This terrific wine is a blend of Mencía, Albarín Negro, Carrasquin and Verdejo Tinto (the first and last the only two varieties I have ever heard of in this mix outside of this fine wine!), and they work together beautifully! 2017-2030+. **92.**

**2012 Corias “Guilfa”- Monasterio de Corias (Cangas- Asturias)**

As I mentioned last year, the Guilfa bottling from Monasterio de Corias is an old vine cuvée made up from an eighty year-old vineyard planted to two of the indigenous grapes of the region: sixty percent Carrasquín and forty percent Verdejo Negro. The wine is raised in a fifty-fifty blend of new and one wine casks. The 2012 Guilfa is a touch riper than the superb 2010 version, tipping the scales at 13.5 percent and offering up a superb bouquet of cassis, chicory, slate minerality, a touch of coffee grounds, woodsmoke and a very discreet topnote of botanicals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. The slightly lower octane 2010 version seemed a touch more transparent out of the blocks than the 2012 version, but this is a fine bottle in the making. 2019-2035+. **92.**

**Valdeorras Blanco**

**2015 Alto de Olaia- Datterra Viticultores- Laura Lorenzo**

The Alto de Olaia bottling from Laura Lorenzo is composed entirely of Godello, planted on granite, gravel and sandy soils. The vineyard is twenty-five to thirty years of age and the wine is barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts in a combination of Spanish chestnut and French oak barrels, with the wines spending nine months *elevage* in the casks prior to bottling. The 2015 Alto de Olaia is outstanding, soaring from the glass in a complex and exotic aromatic combination of tangerine, lemon, wild fennel, gorgeous minerality, dried flowers and summer musk. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and electric, with a great core, superb backend mineral drive, bright acids and laser-like focus on the complex and seamless finish. There is an element of wildness here that would set any “natural wine” lover’s hear pounding, but coupled to a structural stability that is flat out exemplary and very rare to find in the genre! 2017-2030. **93+.**

**2015 Godello “Sobre Liás”- Neno de Viña Somoza**

The 2015 Godello from Neno de Viña Somoza is the entry level bottling from this Valdeorras bodega. “Neno” means “young man” and this is the expression of Godello from this winery that starts out the journey here, with the 2015 offering up a complex and vibrant bouquet of pear, lemon, gently musky floral tones, wild fennel and a nice touch of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with a good core, a fine girdle of acidity and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is tasty already, but this is a wine that is built to age and this wine could use a few years in the cellar to really blossom. Serious juice. 2017-2027. **89+.**

**2015 Godello “AS 2 Ladeiras” Selección- Bodegas Viña Somoza**

The 2015 Godello “AS 2 Ladeiras” Selección from Viña Somoza is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex constellation of tangerine, nectarine, wild flowers, beeswax, a touch of wild fennel and a lovely base of very salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and loaded with personality, with a fine core, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the well-balanced and zesty finish. This is an excellent bottle of Godello that is only going to get better with further bottle age! 2017-2030. **92.**

### **2015 Godello “Sobre Liás” Egedia- Bodegas Viña Somoza**

This is a single vineyard bottling of Godello from Bodegas Viña Somoza, from a parcel of vines planted on a *argilo-calcaire* base of soil. The bottling is barrel-fermented and raised for nine months in French casks. The 2015 Egedia is a notable step up from the entry level “Neno” bottling, soaring from the glass in a complex blend of white peach, hints of green olive, lime blossoms, wild fennel, a beautiful base of soil and a very discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full and zesty, with superb depth at the core, excellent soil signature and a very long, nascently complex and utterly suave, vibrant finish. This too is still a young wine and will be dramatically more complex with five years’ worth of bottle age, but it is so beautifully balanced that it is very, very easy to drink today. 2017-2030+. **93+**.

### **2015 Godello “Montenovo”- Valdesil**

The Valdesil winery is owned by the Prada family, whose ancestor, José Ramon Gayoso was the first to plant Godello in the slate slopes of Valdeorras, all the way back in the 1880s. The family slowly sold off many of the parcels of vines planted by Señor Gayoso during the nadir of wine production here in the first half of the twentieth century, but starting in 2001, the family set about to buy back the myriad of small parcels that had been sold in the past. Today they have recovered all of the original plantings and now cultivate the oldest Godello vines in the world. Their Montenovo bottling is their younger vine bottling and the 2015 offers up a vibrant bouquet of white peach, salty soil tones, a hint of green olive and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and zesty, with a good core, fine soil signature and good length and grip on the moderately complex and energetic finish. Good juice for relatively near-term drinking. 2017-2022+. **89**.

### **2014 Godello “Sobre Liás”- Valdesil**

The 2014 Godello “Sobre Liás” bottling from Valdesil spends six months aging in stainless steel on its fine lees prior to bottling and offers up a lovely and youthful nose of tart pear, fresh coconut, slate minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still tightly-knit, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, primary and nicely mineral finish. Godello ages beautifully and this is still a very young wine. It is approachable now, but its true blossoming is still a couple of years in the future and I would not hesitate to tuck it away in the cellar for a bit. 2017-2030+. **91**.

### **2013 Godello “Pezas da Portela”- Valdesil**

The Pezas da Portela bottling from Valdesil is a cuvée produced from eleven different small parcels in the village of Portela, which were planted to Godello vines at the turn of the century by Señor Gayoso and are now well over one hundred years of age. The different parcels are all vinified separately with wild yeasts in three and four year-old casks, prior to blending and spending an additional six months aging in these older barrels. At this point the wine is racked into stainless steel for an additional year of aging prior to bottling. The 2013 Pezas de Portela is a superb example of Godello, wafting from the glass in a gently oak-influenced blend of pear, fresh almond, a bit of sea salts, dried flowers and a very discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with lovely old vine depth at the core, a nice dollop of soil tones and a long, well-balanced and gently oaky finish. Godello is a very transparent grape and thus, while the casks here are several years old prior to their use, the wine still shows a fair bit of oak influence to its personality, but old vine varietal character really marries beautifully with the wood and the wine is lovely. 2017-2030+. **92+**.



### ***Valdeorras Tinto***

#### **2015 Albarello “O Tesouro”- Bodegas Viña Somoza**

The Albarello “O Tesouro” bottling from Bodegas Viña Somoza is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in older French barrels for twelve months prior to bottling. The vineyard lies at an altitude of five hundred and fifty meters. The 2015 comes in at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol and is a pale ruby color in the glass. The bouquet is pure and savory, wafting from the glass in a mix of dark berries, a touch of tree bark, pepper, excellent soil tones, gentle smokiness and a delicate topnote of botanicals. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and complex, with lovely intensity of flavor, zesty acids, fine focus and grip and a very long, soil-driven and low fat finish. Stylistically, this reminds me a bit of some of my favorite Canary Islands reds. Fine juice. 2017-2035+. **91+**.

#### **2015 Casas de Enriba- Datterra Viticultores- Laura Lorenzo (Valdeorras)**

The Casas de Enriba bottling from Laura Lorenzo hails from vineyards to the east of her home base of Val do Bibei, in the neighboring DO of Valdeorras. This is a blend of eighty percent Mencía and twenty percent of the white wine grape of Godello, as Laura likes the acidity that the Godello brings to the bottling in hot vintages like 2015. The wine is fermented with natural yeasts in stainless steel and raised in older, neutral casks prior to bottling. The 2015 Casas de Enriba is excellent, delivering a fine aromatic mélange of pomegranate, dark berries, coffee grounds, complex soil tones, a touch of wild fennel, bonfire and a whisper of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure and complex, with a full-bodied, seamless

format, excellent mid-palate depth, modest tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, poised and utterly refined finish. This is a terrific bottle! 2017-2035+. **92.**

**2014 Valteiro “María Ardoña”- Bodegas Valdesil**

The 2014 Valteiro “María Ardoña” bottling from Bodegas Valdesil is made from Trousseau and is a fine example of this varietal, which is best known for the wines it produces in the Jura. The wine offers up a fine, savory nose of dark berries, pepper, vinesmoke, slate minerality and a topnote of botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, lovely soil signature and a long, tangy and gently tannic finish. There are some savory notes of pyrazines here that some folks will find untenable, but for the intrepid, there is impressive depth and complexity to be found here. 2017-2040. **90+.**

***Bierzo Blanco***

**2014 Godello “Ultreia La Claudina”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)**

The La Claudina bottling of Godello from Raúl Pérez is fermented and raised in fifteen hundred liter *foudres*, in which a *flor* is allowed to develop and which the wine ages on for anywhere from a year to two before it is bottled. The 2014 La Claudina is deep and complex on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of dried peach, gentle *flor* nuttiness, a touch of orange peel and a lovely base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a fine core, very good focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. The *flor* influence here is gently done and quite attractive. 2017-2025. **90.**

**2014 “La Del Vivo” La Vizcaína- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)**

The “La Del Vivo” La Vizcaína from Raúl Pérez is an old vine blend of Godello and Doña Blanca, which is fermented very uniquely, as eighty percent of the cuvée is barrel fermented in older casks (in which they spend their twelve month *elevage*) and the other twenty percent is fermented in clay amphora and ages there for a year, prior to the two parts being reunited prior to bottling. The 2014 version offers up a bright and complex bouquet of pineapple, lemon, white lilies, a nice base of salty soil, incipient notes of beeswax and just a touch of clay dustiness from the amphora portion of the blend. On the palate the wine is pure, full and quite elegant, with bright acids, excellent focus and grip, a fine core and a very long, soil-driven finish. This is an excellent wine that is drinking nicely, but clearly also has the structure to age. 2017-2030. **92+.**

***Bierzo Tinto***

**2015 Mencía “Ultreia St. Jacques”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)**

The Ulteia St. Jacques” bottling from Raúl Pérez is primarily Mencía, but as is so typical with older vineyards in Galicia, it includes several other varieties, including Bastardo and Garnacha Tintorera. The soils here are clay, rather than slate or granite, which differentiates it quite a bit from Ribeira Sacra. The wine is eighty percent whole clusters and has a long maceration period of anywhere from two to five months, before being raised in a mix of older casks, *foudres* and cement tanks. The 2015 St. Jacques delivers a ripe bouquet of pomegranate, cassis, coffee grounds, a touch of grilled meats, dark soil tones and a bit of wild herb tones reminiscent of young Cornas. On the palate the wine is deep, broad shouldered and focused, with a rock solid core, good soil signature and a long, ripely tannic and well-balanced finish. The deeper soils of this vineyard gives the wine more muscle and less lift than one finds in Amandi, but there is plenty of potential here. 2021-2045+. **91+.**

#### **2014 Viña Barroca Mencía- Bodegas Adrià (Bierzo)**

The 2014 Viña Barroca Mencía from Bodegas Adrià is a very pretty wine, displaying the slightly wild, *garrigue*-infused side of this grape in Bierzo with an impressive degree of transparency. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of dark berries, a touch of pomegranate, the aforementioned *garrigue*, graphite, coffee grounds and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, vibrant and focused, with fine depth in the mid-palate, moderate tannins, tangy acids and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is a serious example of Mencía that will be even better with a few years' worth of bottle age and is an excellent value! 2019-2040. **89+**.

#### **2014 Mencía “El Rapolao” La Vizcaína- César Márquez y Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)**

La Vizcaína is a relatively new project from César Márquez and Raúl Pérez, with the 2011 vintage being the first produced for wine under this label. The 2014 El Rapolao is from a single vineyard that was partially planted in 1920 and partially in 1980. The grapes are a field blend that is primarily Mencía, with a bit of Trousseau and Alicante Bouschet also included. The 2014 version a fine young wine, with plenty of structure on the palate and very good in depth in the nose. The bouquet is still quite primary, offering up scents of cassis, tree bark, coffee grounds, a touch of game, woodsmoke, cedar and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripely tannic, with a good core, fine soil signature and a long, extracted, chewy and promising finish. This will need some time in the cellar to really start to stir. 2022-2050. **90+**.

#### **2014 Mencía “La Vitoriana” La Vizcaína- César Márquez y Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)**

The La Vitoriana bottling from César Márquez and Raúl Pérez is from a decidedly older vineyard, having been planted in 1890. It is the same field blend as above, with the addition of a bit of white grapes (Doña Blanca and Palomino). The 2014 La Vitoriana is also quite youthfully reticent and will need some bottle age to start to blossom. The nose wafts from the glass in a mix of dark berries, charred wood, chicory, dark soil tones, spicy new oak and a touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and chewy, with a bit of backend wood tannin showing today, as well as the skin tannins, but very good depth at the core and there should be no difficulty with the wine eventually absorbing its new wood component. Both of these wines from La Vizcaína are more extracted than the other wines that I tasted from Señor Pérez, and though they are very well-made, they are a bit less charming out of the blocks and will demand some time alone in the cellar to start to become drinkable. They should both be very good in time, but I like several of the other bottlings from this gifted winemaker quite a bit more stylistically. 2022-2050. **91**.

#### **2014 Mencía “Ultreia”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)**

The highly regarded consulting winemaker, Raúl Pérez, is the artisan behind the wines of Ulteia, which hail from his home region of Bierzo. His 2014 entry level Mencía includes a small percentage of other grapes planted in the old field blend here, including Bastardo and Garnacha Tintorera. The wine is whole cluster fermented, aged in older casks and bottled without fining or filtration. The 2014 is a fine bottle, offering up a deep and pure bouquet of cassis, pomegranate, *garrigue*, dark soil tones, a touch of pepper and espresso. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely soil-driven in personality, with a good core, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and blossoming finish. This is certainly approachable today, but will be even better with some bottle age. 2017-2035+. **90**.

#### **2014 Mencía “Ultreia La Cova de la Raposa”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)**

The La Cova de la Raposa is from one of the oldest vineyards with which Raúl Pérez works, as it was planted at the end of the nineteenth century in sandy soils. It is the customary field blend of the region- mostly Mencía with the usual red grape suspects and a bit of Doña Blanca. The wine is fermented without destemming and has a forty to sixty day maceration, prior to racking to French barrels for its *elevage*. The 2014 La Cova de la Raposa delivers a fine, youthfully complex nose of cassis, coffee grounds, dark soil tones, a bit of tree bark, roasted game and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a powerful personality, ripe tannins and a long, moderately chewy and very well-balanced finish. This is still a puppy and needs some bottle age to blossom, but it should prove to be excellent and quite long-lived once it has had a chance to open up. 2022-2050. **91.**

#### **2014 Mencía “Ultreia de Paluezas”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)**

The 2014 Mencía “Ultreia de Paluezas” from Raúl Pérez is from somewhat younger vines than many of his other single vineyard bottlings from Bierzo, but certainly not young vines, as this vineyard was planted in 1945! There is a bit of Garnacha Tintorera and Bastardo planted here as well and the soils are clay, rather than sandy. The wine is vinified in similar fashion to the above, with whole clusters, a fairly long maceration and then aging in barrel for one year prior to bottling. The 2014 Paluezas offers up a fine aromatic blend, wafting from the glass in a mix of sweet dark berries, pomegranate, espresso, a fine base of soil, a touch of fresh herbs and a discreet topnote of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a superb core of fruit, lovely focus and grip, ripe tannins and impressive length and grip on the soil-driven finish. While this is every bit as young as the La Cova de la Raposa, it strikes me as significantly more elegant out of the blocks and promises more complexity and breed at full maturity. This is outstanding! 2021-2050. **93+.**

#### **2014 Mencía “Ultreia el Rapolao”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)**

The Ulteia el Rapolao bottling is again very old vines, planted in the late nineteenth century and the customary field blend of mostly Mencía, with Bastardo, Garnacha Tintorera and Doña Blanca also planted here in small percentages. The wine is fermented in open top chestnut vats with all its stems and raised in smaller French casks. The 2014 version delivers excellent complexity on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of cassis, espresso, incipient pomegranate, dark soil tones, bonfire, chicory and a touch of spicy wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a sappy, old vine core, great transparency, fine-grained tannins and excellent focus and grip on the very long and still fairly primary finish. This has great potential and is the pick of the litter in this really impressive lineup of old vine Bierzo bottlings! 2021-2050. **94.**

#### **2014 Mencía “Ultreia Valtuille”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Bierzo)**

The 2014 “Ultreia Valtuille” bottling of Mencía from Raúl Pérez is truly an old vine cuvée, as this vineyard was planted at the end of the nineteenth century! It is principally Mencía, but again includes a few other grapes in its traditional field blend. It is fermented whole cluster with indigenous yeasts and raised in older barrels prior to bottling. The 2014 Valtuille delivers a fine aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, gentle meatiness, a touch of graphite, chicory, a complex base of dark soil, woodsmoke and just a dollop of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with a firm chassis of ripe tannins, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long, peppery and nascently complex finish. This is a notable step up in mid-palate intensity than the very good regular bottling, as the old vines



deliver more depth and structural precision. This needs some bottle age to really sing, but will be a terrific wine once it has blossomed. 2020- 2045. 92+.



#### **2014 Las Gundiñas- La Vizcaína (Bierzo)**

The La Vizcaína label is another line of wines from Raúl Pérez, hailing from vineyards further west towards the ancient pilgrimage center of Santiago do Compostela, near the boundary of Ribeira Sacra. These are single vineyard wines, with Las Gundiñas planted on a mix of limestone and clay, with these old vines having gone into the ground in 1910! The 2014 version is an excellent young wine, offering up a bouquet of cassis, dark berries, coffee grounds, a fine base of soil, a touch of tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with plenty of mid-palate stuffing, ripe tannins and a long, youthful and well-balanced finish. This will be an excellent wine, but give it some time alone in the cellar! 2022-2050. 93.

#### **2014 La Poullosa- La Vizcaína (Bierzo)**

The La Poullosa vineyard was planted in 1940, and like most of the vineyards in this region, is composed of a field blend that is primarily Mencía, but also includes Bastardo, Garnacha Tintorera and a few white grapes as well, with everything going into the cuvée. The soils here have a fair bit of clay and stones, without the same slate found further west. The twenty percent of the grapes here are destemmed and the wine's *elevage* takes place in older Burgundy casks. The 2014 La Poullosa is outstanding aromatically, delivering scents of cassis,

chicory, graphite, cigar smoke, lovely soil tones and coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, very good soil inflection, ripe, nicely-integrated tannins and impressive grip on the long and very nicely balanced finish. This is accessible today, but is really built for the cellar and deserves at least four or five years' worth of bottle age. 2022-2045+. **92+**.

### ***Monterrei***

#### **2015 Treixadura y Godello- Vía Arxénteo (Manuel Guerra Justo)**

The 2015 Treixadura y Godello from Manuel Guerra Justo's Vía Arxénteo winery is lovely, with excellent depth and complexity on both the nose and palate. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and stays here until bottling, with a bit of fine lees nurturing prior to bottling. The 2015 is bright and loaded with personality on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of lime, tart pear, complex, salty soil tones, a touch of citrus peel, dried flowers and a whiff of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, zesty and complex finish. This is a terrific wine! 2017-2025. **92+**.

#### **2014 Mencía- Bodegas Triay (Monterrei)**

The 2014 Mencía from Bodegas Triay (who also makes superb Godello) is a lovely middleweight, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and offering up a bright and complex bouquet of dark berries, espresso, dark soil tones, tree bark and a topnote of distant bonfires. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with a lovely signature of soil, a good core, modest tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. This has the more pinot noir-like personality one finds more typically with Mencía in Ribeira Sacra, rather than the more muscular style of the grape seen more often in Bierzo and Monterrei. This is really, really good, light on its feet Mencía and an absolute steal in price! 2017-2035+. **91**.

### ***Toro***

#### **2012 Pintia (Vega Sicilia)**

The 2012 Pintia from Vega Sicilia is a big boy, tipping the scales at a full fifteen percent octane. The wine was first produced in the 1996 vintage and is comprised entirely of older vine tempranillo, with the vines ranging from forty to sixty years of age. The wine is raised in French oak. The 2012 Pintia ripe, complex and very well-made in its style, wafting from the glass in an aromatic combination of black cherries, black raspberries, chocolate, a touch of dark soil tones and a very nice base of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very velvety on the attack, with a fine core, really good focus and grip and a long, gently warm and modestly chewy finish. I have never had a fifteen percent octane wine that is this well-balanced, but that is still pretty heady alcohol and one's enjoyment of this wine is going to be partially based on how well one can handle that level of ripeness. 2017-2030+. **90**.

### ***Rueda***

#### **2015 Verdejo- Egeo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)**

The 2015 Verdejo from Egeo is produced from sixty year-old vines, with the wine fermented in stainless steel tanks and aged for three months on its fine lees prior to bottling. The wine is lovely on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a vibrant constellation of lemon, sandy soil tones, a touch of paraffin, spring flowers and a hint of green olive in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely transparent, with a good core,

zesty acids and fine balance on the long and complex finish. A fine example of Verdejo. 2017-2020. **88+**.

### ***Ribera del Duero***

#### **2014 Graciano “Finca Cascorrales”- Garcia Georgieva (Ribera del Duero)**

The Graciano “Finca Cascorrales” is made by both Goyo Garcia and his lovely wife, Diana Semova Georgieva. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and spend a year in older French casks prior to bottling. The 2014 version is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a vibrant aromatic constellation of black cherries, a touch of cranberry, pepper, charred wood, dark soil tones, coffee bean, a lovely base of soil and a gently savory topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with an excellent core, impeccable focus and balance, moderate tannins and a very long, poised and nascently complex finish. Fine juice in the making. 2020-2045+. **93**.

#### **2014 El Pedrosal- Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas (Ribera del Duero)**

El Pedrosal is a recent addition to the lineup at Bodegas Pérez Pascuas, who is best known for their very fine Viña Pedrosa lineup. This is the third vintage of this Joven bottling that I have tasted, which is fermented in stainless steel and raised in a small percentage of new wood. The 2014 El Pedrosal is a tad riper than the last two vintages, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol and offering up a ripe and classy nose of black cherries, plums, milk chocolate, a hint of cigar wrapper and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and carries its octane pretty well, with a good, solid core, a nice touch of soil tones, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the gently heady finish. I like the style of this bottling very much indeed, as the oak is done quite judiciously, but my palate would love to see it stay under the fourteen percent range of alcohol (if possible in a given vintage). A very good bottle in its riper style. 2017-2027. **88**.

#### **2014 Viña Pedrosa Crianza- Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2014 Viña Pedrosa Crianza is a very good example of a riper, but still old school Ribera del Duero. The wine tips the scales at a fairly heady 14.5 percent octane, but offers up a fine and complex nose of plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, a fine base of soil, gentle nuttiness and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a plump core of fruit, fine-grained tannins and lovely length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This has a bit more mid-palate stuffing than the 2014 El Pedrosal, which buffers the backend alcohol a bit better, but the wine does not have quite the same focus. This too is quite good in its style, but a touch lower octane might result in a truly stunning, rather than a very good bottle. I would opt to give this a year or two in the cellar to allow some of its secondary layers to emerge, though it is pretty tasty already! 2019-2035. **89**.

#### **2013 Alion (Ribera del Duero)**

I routinely bought a case of Alion for my cellar each vintage for the first several years after Vega Sicilia started this project, but as the years rolled by, I somehow lost track of this wine and was delighted when the team at Vega sent the new vintage in my box of samples. The 2013 Alion is comprised entirely of tempranillo and raised in new French wood. The wine is ripe at 14.5 percent octane, but also refined and beautifully balanced. The bouquet offers up a classy blend of black cherries, plums, cocoa powder, cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil and smoky, nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely transparent in profile, with a good core, fine focus and grip, ripe tannins and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish.

This wine is beautifully made in its style, with the new wood very well done and the ripeness level managed with dexterity. 2017-2030+. **91.**

**2013 Cobero Tinto- Goyo Garcia Viadero (Ribera del Duero)**

The Cobero bottling, as readers may recall, is a blend of seventy percent old vine Mencía and thirty percent even older vine Palomino, which he co-ferments and raised in old barrels. The 2013 version is outstanding, delivering a deep, complex and classy bouquet of cassis, tree bark, superb soil tones, chicory, a touch of grilled meat, graphite and a whisper of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with beautiful transparency, tangy acids and a very long, focused and modestly tannic finish. The Palomino here probably kicks the alcohol level up a bit (the wine is 13.5 percent octane), as well as giving it really zesty acidity. This is a very unique and outstanding bottle. 2020-2045+. **92.**

**2012 Tinto “Finca el Peruco”- Goyo Garcia Viadero (Ribera del Duero)**

As readers may recall, the Finca el Peruco bottling from Goyo Garcia hails from a vineyard more than eighty years of age, planted at a thousand meters above sea level on a fine base of clay and limestone and includes fifteen percent of Albillo planted with the Tempranillo. The 2012 version is a stunning young wine, delivering depth and breed in its still fairly youthful bouquet of black cherries, plums, cigar smoke, limestone soils, a touch of citrus zest and a very discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full and vibrant, with a sappy core of fruit, stunning minerality (particularly for Ribera del Duero), ripe, seamless tannins and superb length and grip on the tangy, complex and utterly stunning finish. All this superb wine needs is time in the cellar! 2023-2060. **94+.**

**2012 Valdepila de Milénico (Ribera del Duero)**

The Valdepila bottling from Bodega Milénico is composed of one hundred percent Tempranillo and is raised in a mix of larger French casks and American barrels. The 2015 Valdepila is pretty ripe at 14.5 percent alcohol and offers up a ripe and pure bouquet of black plums, cherries, chocolate, violets and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit heady on the backend, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, pure finish. I would love to see this wine just a half point lower in octane, as it would give the wine more bounce and precision. This is quite good, but has room to grow at lower alcohol levels, as the heat just pokes out on the finish in the 2012 version. 2017-2030. **87+.**

**2012 Viña Pedrosa Reserva- Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2012 Viña Pedrosa Reserva includes ten percent cabernet sauvignon in its *cépages* and is aged in a combination of French and American casks for two years prior to bottling. The bouquet is excellent, delivering a superb combination of black cherries, a touch of dark berry, gentle meatiness, cigar ash, cloves and gently spicy oak tones. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with a fine core, impressive nascent complexity, lovely focus and balance and a long, ripely tannic and very promising finish. This will be excellent with a bit of bottle age, as there are layers of complexity yet to emerge, but for those too curious to wait, it is really already quite easy to drink! I would not object to a bit less new wood here and more one and two wine casks, but this is really quite refined Ribera del Duero. 2020-2045. **92.**

**2012 Viña Pedrosa “La Navilla” Reserva- Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas**

The single vineyard bottling of La Navilla hails from a higher elevation parcel, planted at nearly nine hundred meters above sea level, with plenty of chalk in the soils. The vines here are thirty years of age. The 2012 La Navilla Reserva has just been released and the wine is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex aromatic constellation of black cherries, plums, a touch of

cigar wrapper, raw cocoa, fresh nutmeg, cloves and a generous framing of French vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with outstanding mid-palate depth, ripe, gently chewy tannins, fine focus and grip and just a touch of wood tannin poking out on the young and nascently complex finish. Structurally, this wine is already quite approachable, but I would opt to tuck it away in the cellar for at least a couple of years and let the oak more fully integrate on the backend. This is a really lovely bottle of Ribera del Duero in the making, and I give a very slight nod to the above only because I prefer the way that wine is carrying its oak at the present time. But, both wines are excellent. 2020-2045+. **91+**.

#### **2012 Valbuena 5- Vega Sicilia (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2012 Valbuena 5 from Vega Sicilia does not contain any of the merlot in the blend this year, as the vineyards did not do well in the drought and consequently, this wine is composed entirely of tempranillo in 2012. The bouquet is young and classy, offering up a lovely framing of smoky, nutty new oak to go along with notes of black cherries, cassis, Cuban cigar, a nice touch of soil and dark chocolate. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a good core, a bit more soil signature than the nose suggests, firm, youthful tannins and lovely length and grip on the promising finish. There are plenty of oak tannins on the backend here that need to be integrated, but there seems to be sufficient stuffing to do so with extended bottle age. I started drinking Valbuena in the vintages of the early 1980s and the wines seemed less oaky upon release back then than this 2012, but this wine is made to age after all, and the new oak should not be an issue down the road. Still, I would love to see it a bit less new oaky out of the blocks, as the purity of fruit and soil signature here are very special under the wood. 2022-2045+. **92**.

#### **2011 Tinto “Finca Viñas de Arcilla”- Goyo Garcia Viadero (Ribera del Duero)**

As readers may recall, the Finca Viñas de Arcilla is the only one hundred percent Tempranillo bottling from Goyo Garcia, with the vineyard here having a bit more clay than in the other parcels and giving the wine a bit more plushness as a result. The 2011 delivers outstanding breed on the nose, with scents of cassis, black cherries, cigar wrapper, gentle spice tones, a fine base of soil, violets and a hint of cedar wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit more structured out of the blocks than the other single vineyard wines, with a rock solid core, fine soil inflection, firm, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and very well-balanced finish. Though the Finca Viñas de Arcilla does not contain any Albillo, the acidity here is still excellent and rather remarkable for the region! 2023-2060. **93**.

#### **2011 Finca Valdeolmos- Goyo Garcia Viadero (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2011 Finca Valdeolmos from Goyo Garcia is an absolutely stunning young wine, coming in at 13.5 percent octane, which is quite low for this drought vintage in Ribera del Duero. The wine is bright and complex on the nose, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, plums, cigar smoke, a fine base of chalky soil tones, violets, just a hint of cedar and a topnote of gentle spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very transparent for young Ribera del Duero, with a lovely core of fruit, good acids and fine focus and grip on the very long, soil-driven and suavely tannic finish. This could do with a few years in the cellar to start to show some of its secondary layers of complexity, but the wine is so beautifully balanced that it is already quite easy and enjoyable to be opening bottles now! A beautiful wine in the making! 2021-2060+. **94**.

**2010 Reserva Especial “G.G.V.”- Goyo Garcia Viadero (Ribera del Duero)**

The Reserva Especial bottling from Goyo Garcia is aged fully five years in older French casks prior to bottling and is a very rare wine- in fact, this is the first time I have ever tasted it or even heard of its existence! I am not sure from which vineyard the Reserva Especial hails, but the wine is flat out brilliant, soaring from the glass in a refined and vibrant blaze of black plums, sweet Cuban cigars, black cherries, coffee bean, beautifully complex soil tones, incipient nuttiness, touch of lavender, gentle cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with great depth in the mid-palate, bright acids, modest tannins and superb length and grip on the impeccably well-balanced finish. This has decades of life still ahead of it, but at age seven, the wine is already very, very easy to drink! It reminds me a bit of the 1975 Vega Sicilia Único when that wine was younger, but obviously with some Albillo in the cuvée to add bounce and brightness. A brilliant wine! 2017-2060. **96.**

**2010 Viña Pedrosa Gran Reserva- Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2010 Gran Reserva from Viña Pedrosa is an excellent wine on both the nose and palate. The wine is 14.5 percent octane, which is about par for the DO, but the ripeness is quite well handled on the palate. The bouquet is really starting to blossom nicely at age seven, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, red plums, cocoa powder, cigar wrapper, cloves, a fine base of soil and a nice base of new wood. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and very nicely focused, with a good core, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and impressive length and grip on the gently warm finish. This needs another four or five years in the cellar to really soften up on the backend (though it is already pretty easy to drink with lamb chops!) and is a fine example of the vintage. 2021-2060. **92.**

**2006 Viña Pedrosa Gran Reserva- Bodegas Hermanos Pérez Pascuas (Ribera del Duero)**

The 2006 Viña Pedrosa Gran Reserva is a touch lower in octane than the 2010 version, coming in at an even fourteen percent and offering up a bit more precision and freshness on both the nose and palate as a result. The bouquet today is nicely secondary in profile, jumping from the glass in a blend of red plums, black cherries, cocoa, fresh nutmeg, a hint of blood orange, lovely soil tones, cigar ash and a very well done framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with a fine core of fruit, a good dollop of soil, melting tannins, sound acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and beautifully balanced and gently tarry finish. This is superb and just entering its plateau of peak maturity at age eleven- it should continue to drink very well indeed for several more decades! 2017-2035+. **94.**

**2005 Vega Sicilia Único (Ribera del Duero)**

The new release of 2005 Vega Sicilia Único is an absolutely stunning wine in the making, with great depth, precision and vibrancy that augurs very well for its positive evolution in bottle. The bouquet is very pure and still quite primary, wafting from the glass in a nascently complex constellation of black cherries, black plums, Montecristos, raw cocoa, a complex base of soil tones and a masterful base of smoky, gently spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and utterly seamless, with superb depth at the core, impeccable focus and balance and a very long, ripely tannic and youthful finish. This vintage of Único seems to be cut from the same cloth as the more elegant legendary years like 1970 and 1985, but it is still a very young wine and needs at least another decade in the cellar to start to blossom and drink with conviction. 2027-2085. **96+.**



### **1989 Vega Sicilia Único (Ribera del Duero)**

The 1989 Único is a classic bottle in the making, but as is typical of this flagship wine from Vega Sicilia, it is still a tad youthful at age twenty-eight and could still do with several more years in the cellar to fully blossom. The promising and refined bouquet offers up scents of plums, black cherries, cigar wrapper, lovely soil tones, blood orange, a lovely base of soil and a touch of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, still a fair bit of moderate tannins and a long, very well-balanced and classy finish. 2020-2075. **95+.**

### **1970 Vega Sicilia Único (Ribera del Duero)**

The 1970 vintage of Vega Sicilia Único is one of the greatest to ever emerge from these cellars and I have been smitten by this wine since it was first released in the mid-1990s. The bouquet today is flat out beautiful, soaring from the glass in a very refined blend of black cherries, blood orange, gentle nuttiness, a lovely array of spices, raw cocoa, cigar wrapper, complex soil nuances and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and one of the most elegant vintages of Único ever produced, with a rock solid core of fruit, laser-like focus, fine-grained, melting tannins and impeccable balance on the very long, complex and stunning finish. A brilliant wine in every respect! 2017-2060. **98.**





## ***Txakoli***

### **2015 Getariako-Txakolina- Bengoetxe**

The 2015 Getariako-Txakolina from Bengoetxe is showing impressive depth and nascent aromatic complexity out of the blocks, with a nicely mineral and structured palate that will certainly repay aging. The bouquet is still quite primary, offering up scents of desiccated pears, lemongrass, citrus peel, wet stone minerality, sea salts, hints of the beeswax to come with bottle age and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still rather primary in personality, with good acids, fine focus and a long, well-balanced finish. This really needs a year or two in bottle to start to hit on all cylinders, but the vintage seems just touch heavy-handed in comparison to the more lithesome wines here in 2012 and 2013. 2019-2025. **88.**

## ***Navarra***

### **2015 Sauvignon Blanc- Aliaga (Bodegas Camino del Villar)**

The 2015 Sauvignon Blanc from Aliaga is a spry and vibrant example of this varietal, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and offering up a zesty bouquet of tangerine, lime zest, damp grass, a nice base of minerality and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and brimming with personality, with good, but not great depth at the core, bright acids and fine length and grip on the complex finish. A tasty example. 2017-2019. **89.**

### **2015 Garnacha- Viña Zorzal**

The Garnacha from Viña Zorzal is made from dry-farmed old bush vines that are grown at fifteen hundred meters above sea level and harvested by hand. The 2015 comes in at a very civilized fourteen percent octane and offers up a vibrant bouquet of crushed raspberries, cherries, bonfire, soil tones, a bit of roasted meats and a topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, plenty of underlying soil tones and a long, moderately tannic and focused finish. Good juice. 2017-2030+. **89+.**

### **2014 Tempranillo “Patricia”- Aliaga (Bodegas Camino del Villar)**

The 2014 Tempranillo from Aliaga is a good, robust example of this grape, offering up a bright and exuberant bouquet of black cherries, cigar wrapper, a good base of soil, gentle spice tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a good core, modest tannins and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is not the most complex example of Tempranillo, but it packs plenty of depth and personality for a very reasonable price tag! 2017-2027. **88.**

### **2014 Graciano- Viña Zorzal**

The Graciano bottling from Viña Zorzal is produced from thirty-five year-old vines that are grown on very rocky soils. The wine is aged in older French casks after fermentation with indigenous yeasts. The 2014 Graciano offers up superb depth and complexity on the nose, with scents of dark berries, coffee bean, a bit of savory meatiness, wild fennel, pepper and soil tones wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, black fruity and full-bodied, with plenty of pepperiness, a fine core, good backend minerality and a long, moderately tannic and tangy finish. This is an excellent example of Graciano that is drinking well today, but has the chassis to age very nicely as well and will be even better with a couple of years in the cellar. Impressive! 2017-2035+. **91.**

**2012 Colección Privada- Aliaga (Bodegas Camino del Villar)**

The 2012 Colección Privada from Aliaga is a blend of eighty percent Tempranillo and twenty percent Cabernet Sauvignon, with the wine raised in a mix of French and American casks for twelve months prior to bottling. The 2012 is an even thirteen percent octane and offers up excellent depth on the nose, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, a fine base of soil, a touch of new leather and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a good core, a nice base of soil and a long, meltingly tannic and complex finish. This is a wine of impressive complexity and depth and is another excellent value! 2017-2030+. **90.**

**2015 Vendimia Tardía Moscatel Petit Grain- Aliaga (Bodegas Camino del Villar) 375 ml.**

The 2015 Vendimia Tardía Moscatel Petit Grain from Aliaga is a very pretty and floral dessert wine, offering up a perfumed bouquet of pear, tangerine, a touch of honeycomb, orange blossoms and a nice base of white soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and moderately sweet (like a young Auslese), with good depth at the core, sound framing acids and good length and grip on the finish. This is Navarra, so the acids are not racy, but they are just fine to supply lift and support for the next five to seven years, over which time this wine will drink very nicely indeed and is a very good value. 2017-2025. **89.**

**2010 Garnacha Vieja- Aliaga (Bodegas Camino del Villar)**

Aliaga's 2010 Garnacha Vieja is a ripe and generous example of this fine varietal, as the old vines here give the wine a lovely sappiness on both the nose and palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of black raspberries, roasted meats, *garrigue*, a fine base of chalky soil tones and a topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and still moderately tannic on the backend, with fine generosity on the attack, a rock solid core and good length and grip on the spicy finish. 2017-2030. **88.**

**2008 Reserva de la Familia- Aliaga (Bodegas Camino del Villar)**

The 2008 Reserva de la Familia from Aliaga is a blend of three-quarters Tempranillo and one-quarter Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine is quite ripe at 13.9 percent octane, but is aging nicely and beginning to show some nice secondary elements in its bouquet of black cherries, cigar wrapper, a touch of bonfire, a fine base of soil, delicate spice tones and just a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fully mature, with a plush core, fine grip and a long, modestly tannic and velvety finish. This is fairly low acid (this is Navarra after all), but the wine has good balance and is drinking very nicely today, with a patina of aged complexity that is quite rare to find in wines in this price range. 2017-2025. **88.**

**2002 Antonio Corpus- Viña Aliaga (Bodegas Camino del Villar)**

It has been a bit more than a year since I last tasted this old vine Garnacha bottling from Viña Aliaga, and the wine continues to drink very well indeed. The bouquet is deep and nicely mature in its mélange of baked black cherries, raspberries, grilled game, *garrigue*, a good base of soil, dried eucalyptus and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with generous core of fruit, modest tannins and impressive length and grip on the focused and wide open finish. This is good juice and a fine value! 2017-2025. **90.**

**2001 Vendimia Seleccionada- Viña Aliaga (Bodegas Camino del Villar)**

I last had a bottle of the 2001 Vendimia Seleccionada from Viña Aliaga at the start of last year and the wine has continued to blossom beautifully over the ensuing fifteen months. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite classy, offering up scents of lavender, black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, wild fennel, a fine base of soil and a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a fine core, moderate tannins and a long, soil-

driven and impressively complex finish. This is a blend of seventy percent Tempranillo and thirty percent Cabernet Sauvignon, and these grapes seem to really excel in the *terroir* of Navarra. There is naturally a fair bit of sediment in this wine at sixteen years of age, so make sure to decant it! This is a fine value for a fully mature, robust wine that will also continue to age gracefully for many more years. 2017-2030. **92.**

### ***La Mancha***

#### **2015 Fatum Blanco (Airen- Sauvignon Blanc- Macabeu) – Manuel Manzaneque Suárez**

The 2015 Fatum Blanco is an interesting blend, as half the cuvée is produced from fifty year-old Airen vines, with the rest of the blend composed of thirty-five percent Macabeo and fifteen percent Sauvignon Blanc. The wine is fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks, with four months spent on the fine lees prior to racking and bottling. The wine offers up a lovely nose of green fruit, wild fennel, salty soil tones, gently musky floral tones and just a hint of green olive in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a superb core, lovely soil signature, bright acids and excellent focus and balance on the long and vibrant finish. An excellent value! 2017-2022. **88+.**

### ***Cataluña Blanco y Rosat***

#### **2015 La Rumbera- Oriol Artigas (Alella)**

The La Rumbera bottling from Oriol Artigas is made of a blend of eighty percent Pansa Blanca and twenty percent Garnaxta Blanca. Twenty percent of the cuvée is barrel-fermented, with the remainder fermented in stainless steel and then the wines are blended and spend six months *elevage* on their fine lees in stainless. The 2015 version offers up a wild and complex bouquet of quince, gentle leesy tones, salty soil, citrus peel, dried flowers and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and racy, with a good core, fine soil signature and impressive length and grip on the vibrant and youthful finish. There is a bit of “natural wine” unpredictability on the nose here, but this wine is rock solid structurally and reminds me a bit of a low fat example of Laurent Ponsot’s Monts Luisants Blanc, with a tracer of ocean breeze running through the heart of the wine. This is good now and will be even better with a bit of bottle age! 2017-2025+. **91.**

#### **2015 Peça d’en Blanch “Vinyes Velles”- Oriol Artigas (Alella)**

The Peça d’en Blanch “Vinyes Velles” cuve from Oriol Artigas is made from a field blend of Pansa Blanca and Pansa Rosado (no, I have no experience with these grapes beyond Señor Artigas’ wines!) that is fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless and then raised in older vats for ten months prior to bottling. The 2015 Peça d’en Blanch shows a bit of influence from the Pansa Rosado grapes, as this has a golden peach tinge to the color, but offers up a bright and complex bouquet of tangerine, quince, briny overtones, a stony base of minerality, a touch of pecan, orange peel and a topnote of beeswax. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and long, long, long, with a fine core, excellent transparency and a complex, snappy finish. Picture a cross between an aged Chablis and the Jura, with a bit of briny Muscadet thrown in on the side! This is complex, complete and utterly individual in style. 2017-2025+. **93.**

#### **2015 Le Prats- Oriol Artigas (Alella)**

Alella is one of the smallest D.O.s in Spain, as this region lies only fifteen kilometers north of Barcelona on the Mediterranean coast and most of its vineyard lands have been swallowed up by folks searching for weekend beach houses. Oriol Artigas came to winemaking as a second career (after a short time as a laboratory-based scientist) and started out his

commercial operation only in 2011, after several years working for other bodegas in Catalunya. His Le Prats bottling is a single vineyard wine that is planted to a wild scrum of old, indigenous grape varieties (there could be as many as fifty different grapes planted here- some more than one hundred years of age!) that he chooses to just ferment all together. The combination of both red and white varieties results in a lovely Rosat (after twelve hours skin contact), with the 2015 offering up an exotic and complex bouquet of quince, rhubarb, nutskin, salty minerality and straw. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and slightly reductive, with a lovely core, great backend mineral drive, snappy acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. There is a wildness to this wine that draws one to it like a moth to a flame! Great and utterly unique juice! 2017-2025. **92.**

**2015 Vinya d'en Mundu "Vinyes Velles"- Oriol Artigas (Alella)**

The 2015 Vinya d'en Mundu "Vinyes Velles" from Oriol Artigas is composed entirely of old vine Pansa Blanco, which he ferments and ages in old, five hundred liter casks and bottles the wine without fining or filtration. The wine offers up a superb, albeit slightly reductive bouquet of baked pears, salty minerality, dried flowers, lemongrass and a hint of fresh rosemary in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and nicely balanced, with a good core, fine soil signature, moderate acids and a long, classy finish. I would love a touch more acidity here, but I imagine this was a very hot year in Alella. 2017-2020. **89.**

**2015 Donzella- Suriol (Penedès)**

The Donzella bottling is composed entirely of Xarel-lo, which is fermented in concrete vats with indigenous yeasts and goes through full malolactic. The 2015 Donzella comes in at a cool twelve percent octane and offers up a bright and complex nose of lemon, tart pear, chalky soil tones, a nice touch of fresh almond and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, fine soil signature and a long, classy and wide open finish. The acids are not particularly high here, so the wine will probably want drinking in the next few years, but there is a ton of pleasure to be had here over that timeframe! 2017-2020. **90.**

***Cataluña Tinto***

**2015 Mas Pelisser- Oriol Artigas (Alella)**

The 2015 Mas Pelisser from Oriol Artigas is a very light-bodied red wine, offering up a bright bouquet of cranberry, cinnamon, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil and a touch of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is lean, tangy and soil-driven, with still a touch of dissolved CO<sub>2</sub>, modest tannins and rather unexpected complexity on the long and intensely flavored finish. This is low fat at 12.5 percent octane and will not be for everyone, but it grew on me as it had a chance to open with air. 2017-2025+. **88+.**

**2015 Peça d'en Blanch Negre- Oriol Artigas (Alella)**

The Peça d'en Blanch Negre bottling from Oriol Artigas is a blend of Garnacha and Pansa Blanca, made with very old vines and fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel tanks. The wine is aged for ten months in old French casks prior to bottling without fining or filtration. The 2015 Peça d'en Blanch Negre is quite a bit deeper in color than the Mas Pelisser and delivers an excellent bouquet of dark berries, botanicals, wild rosemary, gorgeous soil tones, a touch of ocean breeze (the vines are less than a half mile in from the ocean) and a touch of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very transparent, with tangy acids, moderate, well-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused finish. There is a nice touch of backend bitterness that recalls Emidio Pepe's

Montepulciano. Fine juice that is quite tasty already, but will be ever better with a bit of cellaring. 2017-2035. **92.**

**2015 Sumoll- Bohigas**

This has to be one of the most limited production wines I have ever had the pleasure to taste, as the folks at Bohigas make all of fifty cases of this wine! It is produced from an old vine parcel of Sumoll principally planted in 1945 (one small section dates back to 1923), which is then fermented and aged in amphora. The vines are bush-trained and the soils here are a combination of clay and limestone, with the vineyard located at four hundred meters, which help keep the octane to an even thirteen percent. The wine offers up a deep and youthfully complex bouquet of black cherries, licorice, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil and a touch of coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and beautifully transparent, with tangy acids, moderate tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is fine juice! 2017-2030+. **91.**

**2012 Sang de Drac- Suriol (Penedès)**

The 2012 Sang de Drac from Suriol is made up entirely of the local strain of Tempranillo, with the wine fermented in a combination of stainless steel and cement tanks, prior to its *elevage* in five hundred liter chestnut casks for ten months prior to racking back into cement vats for a bit of blending ahead of bottling. The wine's ripeness is fairly moderate by the standards of contemporary Penedès, coming in at 13.5 percent and offers up a bouquet of dark berries, tree bark, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of botanicals and chestnut. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit tarry, with a good core, chewy tannins and impressive length and grip on the focused finish. This is still a young wine and needs more bottle age, but it has potential! 2020-2040+. **89.**

***Utiel-Requana and Manchuela***

**2015 Bobal- Vera de Estenas (Félix Martínez Roda)**

The 2015 Bobal from Félix Martínez Roda is produced from old vines (fifty to one hundred years of age) that are planted on clay/limestone soils at an elevation of eight hundred meters, where the diurnal swing brings some relief to the vines from the baking heat of the summer days here. The 2015 Bobal is a cool (for the region) thirteen percent octane and offers up bright and bouncy nose of black cherries, plums, pepper, woodsmoke and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, poised and very nicely balanced, with moderate, well-integrated tannins, respectable acidity and very good length and grip on the youthful finish. This will probably never be particularly complex juice, but it has a lot of charm and is very easy to drink. When the summer heat hits and the grill is in use, this may well be the perfect wine to beat the heat. Good juice. 2017-2025. **88.**

***Rioja Blanco and Rosado***

**2014 Rioja Blanco- Bodegas Lecea (Rioja Alta)**

The 2014 Rioja Blanco from Luis Alberto Lecea is composed entirely of Viura this year (previous iterations of this wine have included some chardonnay) and is really bright and bouncy on the palate. The youthful bouquet offers up scents of green apple, salty soil tones, spring flowers, fresh almond, orange peel and a touch of dusty aromas that make me think this wine has spent part of its *elevage* in cement vats. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and youthful, with that same sense of chalk dust on the backend, a good core and excellent focus and

grip on the still quite primary finish. This needs a bit of air to open up right now and its best days are still ahead of it, as this wine will easily last twenty years in the bottle, but if one decants it now for fifteen or twenty minutes prior to serving, it is already quite tasty. 2017-2040. **88+**.

**2014 Rioja Rosado- Bodegas Lecea (Rioja Alta)**

The 2014 Rioja Rosado from Bodegas Lecea is made from a blend of seventy-five percent Garnacha and twenty-five percent Viura. I tasted this wine a year ago and thought it showed lovely potential and the wine is blossoming nicely with a bit more bottle age. The bouquet is a fine mix of melon, a touch of orange, gentle notes of the beeswax to come, chalky soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven in personality, with a fine core, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the pure and light on its feet finish. This is notably lighter in color than most Rioja Rosados and I really like the freshness and structural integrity that it brings to the table- it will age beautifully. 2017-2030. **89+**.



***Rioja Tinto***

**2015 Rioja Cosecha- Bodegas Akutain (Rioja Alta)**

The 2015 Cosecha from Bodegas Akutain is the first vintage of this entry level bottling that the estate has ever produced. The wine does not see any oak, being fermented and raised in fiberglass vats for a few months prior to bottling. It is predominantly Tempranillo, with a bit of Garnacha included and the 2015 is a lovely young wine made for early drinking, but which also

has the stuffing and chassis to age nicely over the mid-term as well. The bouquet is a stylish mix of black cherries, Rioja spice tones, cigar wrapper and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and juicy, with a good solid core, fine focus and grip and a long, tangy and gently tannic finish. Think classic Rioja aromatics and flavors and the crunchy bounce of young Beaujolais! A lovely combination and a superb value. 2017-2027+. **88.**

#### **2014 Rioja Crianza- Bodegas Akutain (Rioja Alta)**

The 2014 Crianza from the Peñagaricano family, who founded Bodegas Akutain in 1975, is an outstanding example of this level of Rioja. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged for nearly two years in older American oak casks and another year in bottle prior to release (by the way the aging requirements for Crianza are a single year in oak and one year in bottle). The 2014 Crianza is an absolute classic on both the nose and palate, wafting from the glass in a superb blend of red and black cherries, a touch of fresh nutmeg, cloves, a beautiful base of soil, cigar smoke and a nice touch of toasted coconut American oak. On the palate the wine is full, pure and already velvety on the attack, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance, modest tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is a beautiful wine. 2017-2040. **91+.**

#### **2014 Rioja- Bodegas Lecea (Rioja Alta)**

The 2014 “Joven” Rioja bottling from Bodegas Lecea is really a fine bottle and a terrific value, as this wine has depth, nascent complexity and structural integrity far beyond its price point. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, a touch of grilled meats, Rioja spice tones, a fine base of soil and a touch of coriander seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex for such a young Rioja, with a fine core, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced and tangy finish. As the estate ferments in cement tanks, this wine has more personality than many Joven bottlings which are fermented and aged solely in stainless steel. Serious juice. 2017-2030+. **90.**

#### **2014 Corazón de Lago Rioja- Bodegas Lecea (Rioja Alta)**

The Corazón de Lago 2014 from Bodegas Lecea is blossoming beautifully since the last time I tasted it, about a year ago, and is now starting to drink very nicely indeed. The bouquet offers up a garnacha-based blend of raspberries, grilled meats, *garrigue*, blossoming notes of lavender, a fine base of soil and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a fine core, good soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is still a young wine and will age gracefully for decades, but it is also wide open and drinking with plenty of style already. I clearly underrated it a bit last year! 2017-2040. **92.**

#### **2014 Rioja- Viña Zorzal**

The 2014 Rioja from Viña Zorzal is composed of a blend of ninety-five percent tempranillo and five percent garnacha and spends five months aging in used French oak barrels during its *elevage*. The 2014 offers up a fine, youthful nose of black cherries, Rioja spices, a nice base of soil, woodsmoke and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core, fine soil signature, modest tannins and a long, gently chewy finish. This is a very good bottle of Joven Rioja, but I would have liked it even better if it had been raised in older American oak, rather than French. 2017-2030. **89.**

#### **2013 Macán “Classico” Rioja (Rioja Alta)**

Macán is a relatively new joint venture, started a decade ago, by Vega Sicilia and Benjamin de Rothschild, of Château Lafite-Rothschild fame (amongst a myriad of other business



and banking interests). Macán now owns one hundred and twenty hectares of vines in Rioja Alta, with the team at Vega Sicilia overseeing farming and making the wines. The winery produces two wines: Macán “Classico” which emulates a “Second Label” in Bordeaux, and Macán, which is their *Grand Vin*. The wines are raised entirely in French oak. The 2013 Macán “Classico” is produced from lots of wine that are more forward in style and the wine offers up a bouquet of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash and cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and nicely velvety at the core, with blossoming complexity, fairly chewy tannins and good length and grip on the finish. Though this is designed to be the more forward cuvée, the tannins below are more seamlessly integrated in the wine and this seems a bit more chewy out of the blocks. 2020-2040. **89+**.

### **2013 Macán Rioja (Rioja Alta)**

The 2013 Macán *Grand Vin* bottling is ripe and excellent in quality. The still quite youthful nose wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, cassis, cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil and a suave veneer of nutty new French oak. On the palate the wine is pure, sophisticated in structure and full-bodied, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance, ripe, seamless tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and still youthful finish. Texturally, this wine is so beautifully balanced that there is no problem drinking it today, but it is still a very young wine and has just begun its journey and should be left alone in a cool corner of the cellar for another decade to allow more complexity to emerge. It will be outstanding. 2025- 2060. **93+**.

### **2012 Rioja Crianza- Bodegas Akutain (Rioja Alta)**

The 2012 Akutain Crianza is starting to develop some lovely secondary layers of aromatic complexity as it crosses over into its fifth year, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of cherries, raspberries, gentle nuttiness, Rioja spice tones, salty soil tones, cloves and a distinctive touch of oak-derived dill overtones from the older American casks (which I absolutely adore in the wine). On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and nicely transparent, with a respectable core, still a touch of backend tannin and fine length and grip on the complex and tangy finish. This does not have the same sappiness at the core as the 2014 Crianza, but the complexity here is lovely and the wine is drinking with plenty of style in its own right. 2017-2035. **90**.

### **2009 Rioja Reserva- Bodegas Lecea (Rioja Alta)**

The 2009 Reserva from Señor Lecea is blossoming beautifully and is drinking even better than it did a year ago, when I last had a bottle. The bouquet is deep, pure and utterly classical, soaring from the glass in a beautiful mélange of raspberries, red plums, cloves, nutmeg, complex soil tones, salty soil tones, toasted coconut and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, velvety and complex, with a plush core, lovely focus and complexity, moderate, suave tannins and great length and grip on the powerful finish. 2009 is a ripe vintage and many of the wines in Rioja tended towards robustness in personality, but the '09 Lecea Reserva is utterly classic and one of the finest wines I have yet tasted from the vintage! 2017-2050. **93**.

### **2008 Viña Cubillo Rioja- Bodegas López de Heredia (Rioja Alta)**

The 2008 Viña Cubillo from López de Heredia is composed of a blend of sixty-five percent Tempranillo, twenty-five percent Garnacha and ten percent Graciano and Mazuelo. The wine spends three years *elevage* in cask and another three years in bottle prior to release. The wine is showing beautifully today, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of raspberries, cherries,

nutskin, cloves, cigar wrapper, a lovely base of soil tones and a classic touch of older American oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and complex, with a good core, excellent soil signature, modest tannins, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the classy and still developing finish. This is a terrific middleweight that is only going to get better with further bottle age! 2017-2040. **91+**.

#### **2006 Rioja Reserva- Bodegas Akutain (Rioja Alta)**

The 2006 Reserva from Bodegas Akutain has started to blossom nicely in the year since I last saw a bottle, with the wine offering up lovely complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is deep, complex and shows a nice touch of spiciness from its small percentage of Garnacha in the *cépages*, delivering a fine blend of red and black cherries, a touch of spices meats, hints of *garrigue*, a superb base of soil, fresh bay, the first whiff of the nutskin to come and coconutty old American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and starting to get a bit velvety on the attack, with a fine core, impeccable balance, modest tannins and a long, tangy and focused finish. This is really fine juice, and as tasty as it is today, I would opt for giving it just a few more years in the cellar to allow it to really get velvety and wide open. This is terrific Rioja! 2017-2040. **93**.

#### **2004 Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Akutain (Rioja Alta)**

The 2004 Rioja Gran Reserva from Bodegas Akutain has continued to blossom over the course of the fifteen months since I last drank a bottle and this remains one of the most beautiful bottles of classically-styled, old school Rioja in the market today. The wine soars from the glass in a blaze of cherries, red plums, Rioja spice tones, toasted coconut, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil and a distinctive topnote of cloves. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still a tad chewy on the backend, with a beautiful core of fruit, marvelous transparency, moderate tannins and a very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Great juice that will age for decades and decades. 2017-2050+. **94**.

#### **2004 Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Lecea (Rioja Alta)**

The 2004 Gran Reserva from Bodegas Lecea has not missed a beat over the last twelve months since I last drank it and the wine remains one of the very finest old school Rioja values on the market today. The stunningly pure and perfumed nose jumps from the glass in a lovely constellation of cherries, plums, toasted coconut, a hint of eucalyptus, Rioja spices, a complex base of soil and a topnote of cocoa powder. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and silky, with superb mid-palate depth, great focus and complexity, melting tannins and a very, very long and seamless finish. This has the breed, vibrant complexity and elegance that we expect from the likes of López de Heredia and Cuné at a fraction of the price! Great, great juice. 2017-2050. **94+**.

#### **2004 Viña Tondonia Rioja Reserva- Bodegas López de Heredia (Rioja Alta)**

The 2004 Viña Tondonia Reserva is a beautiful bottle that is just starting to blossom, but is clearly built for the long haul and will be drinking far better a decade down the road. The bouquet is deep and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, red plums, toasted coconut, Rioja spice tones, a touch of mustard seed and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a lovely core, excellent soil inflection, fine-grained tannins and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is very easy to drink already, but it has not yet developed the full panoply of Tondonia complexity yet and will be even better with another half dozen years of bottle age. A lovely bottle. 2017-2040+. **94**.

### **1982 Rioja “Imperial” Gran Reserva- Cuné**

Cuné made some of my absolute favorite wines in the vintage of 1982, as the estate seemingly avoided any of the potential pitfalls of overripeness in this torrid summer and produced truly superb and classic wines in '82. The wine is made up of its classic blend of eighty-five percent Tempranillo, ten percent Graciano and five percent Mazuela. The 1982 Imperial Gran Reserva is an excellent wine, wafting from the glass in a complex and still fairly youthful blend of cherries, black raspberries, Rioja spice tones, a nice touch of nutskin, a dollop of menthol and a fine framing of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and elegant, with a fine core of fruit, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced and complex finish. High class juice. 2017-2040+. **93**.

### ***Castilla y León***

#### **2015 Verdejo “Cantayano”- Isaac Cantalapiedra**

Isaac Cantalapiedra and his son, winemaker Maule, cultivate twenty hectares of vines in and just outside of the borders of Rueda- hence the Castilla y León DO on this bottle, despite the fact that seven hectares of their Verdejo vineyards are in the heart of Rueda. This wine is crafted with natural yeast fermentation, with ninety percent fermented in stainless steel and ten percent in older French casks, with the wine spending eight months nurturing on its fine lees prior to bottling. The 2015 Cantayano delivers a deep, complex bouquet loaded with personality, reveling in scents of pear, peach stone, wild fennel, incipient notes of beeswax, salty soil tones and a nice herbal touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and very full-bodied for Verdejo, with a rock solid core, excellent soil signature, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the vibrant and still quite youthful finish. This is a dynamite bottle of Verdejo that should continue to improve over the next five to seven years in the bottle and may well last longer than that! 2017-2025+. **93+**.

#### **2014 “Rock Rose Red” Garnacha**

The Rock Rose Red Garnacha is made by the Cooperativa Vinicola de El Barraco, with the 2014 coming in at fourteen percent octane. The wine offers up a fine nose of cherries, raspberries, *garrigue*, pepper and a fine base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and spicy in personality, with excellent transparency, a fine core and a long, moderately tannic finish. This is really good juice for the price, with broad shoulders, good depth and plenty of personality. 2017-2030. **89**.

#### **2011 Albarín “Rara Avis”- Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez (Castilla y León)**

The Albarín “Rara Avis” from Bodegas y Viñedos Raúl Pérez is an interesting wine, as it spends four to five years aging in cask under its *flor* prior to bottling. The 2011 “Rara Avis” offers up a deep and complex bouquet of Manzanilla-like nutty tones, yellow fruit, salty soil tones, white flowers and orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with fine focus and grip, bright acids, a lovely core and a long, classy and complex finish. This is really, really good! 2017-2030+. **94**.

#### **2011 Preito Picudo- Bodegas y Viños Raúl Pérez (Tierra de León)**

This particular vineyard of Preito Picudo was planted in 1900! Señor Pérez ferments the wine with whole clusters in chestnut vats and then ages the wine four to five years in French oak barrels prior to bottling without fining or filtration. The 2015 offers up a deep and black fruity nose of dark berries, dried fruit tones, coffee grounds, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and a bit of

spicy wood (chestnut?) in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a touch of plushness on the attack, a good core, moderate, chewy tannins and a long, complex finish. This is a fine example of a varietal I do not get to taste with much frequency. 2017-2035+. **92.**

### ***Almansa***

#### **2015 Albahra Garnacha Tintorera- Envínate (Almansa)**

The Albahra bottling from Envínate is composed entirely of thirty year-old Garnacha Tintorera (or Alicante Bouschet). Fifty percent whole clusters, indigenous yeasts and *elevage* in old casks are the cellar formula for this outstanding wine. The 2015 Albahra comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a youthfully complex bouquet of black raspberries, lovely spice tones, black cherries, salty soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of currant leaf, lavender and hints of citrus blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and broad-shouldered, but with better transparency than I recall from the 2013 version a year ago. The core has plenty of stuffing, the tannins are ripe and gently chewy and the finish is long, nascently complex and very well-balanced, closing with plenty of grip and energy. This is a young wine, but it is going to be excellent, and though it may not be qualitatively a big step up from the 2013 version, I like the style better this year. An absolute steal! 2020-2050. **94.**

#### **2014 Albahra Garnacha Tintorera- Envínate (Almansa)**

The 2014 Albahra from Envínate is a touch riper than the 2015 version, but every bit as pure and precise, with some secondary layers of complexity beginning to stir on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is simply superb, wafting from the glass in a complex mélange of black cherries, cola, dark soil tones, a bit of spiced meats, cloves, hints of *garrigue*, Alicante Bouschet leafiness and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full and focused, with excellent transparency, bright acids, fine focus and grip and a very long, vibrant and moderately tannic finish. This wine is still a few years away from blossoming, but its quality is exceptional and one would be hard-pressed to find many other wines at this superb quality level at such a bargain price! Great juice. 2020-2050. **94.**

### ***Viños de Madrid***

#### **2015 Blanco- 4 Monos Viticultores (Viños de Madrid- Sierra de Gredos)**

The basic Blanco bottling from 4 Monos is a blend of sixty percent Albillo, twenty-five percent Moscatel and fifteen percent unknown grapes of the old school, “field blend” tradition. The wine is fermented in a combination of stainless and barrel and aged in older casks for six months prior to bottling. The 2015 Blanco delivers lovely veracity on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, lemon peel, dried flowers, wild fennel and lovely minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full and complex, with superb mid-palate depth, lovely transparency, bright, zesty acids and outstanding length and grip on the snappy finish. This is light on its feet and yet absolutely loaded with intensity! Great juice. 2017-2030. **93.**

#### **2015 Tinto- 4 Monos Viticultores (Viños de Madrid- Sierra de Gredos)**

The blended Tinto from 4 Monos is composed of a mix of eighty-five percent Garnacha, eight percent Cariñena and seven percent Morenillo. The wine is fermented with fifty percent whole clusters with indigenous yeasts and is raised in a combination of three, four and five hundred liter, old barrels for nine months prior to bottling. The 2015 Tinto offers up a bright and complex bouquet of cherries, red currants, lovely minerality, a touch of *garrigue*, gentle smokiness and clove-like spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied,

bouncy and very transparent, with impressive lightness of step, excellent focus and complexity, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and very impressive finish. This wine is very, very tasty today, but will be even better with a few years' worth of bottle age. 2017-2035. **92.**



#### **2014 Albillo Real- 4 Monos Viticultores (Viños de Madrid)**

The Albillo Real bottling from 4 Monos Viticultores is one hundred percent whole clusters, fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in three and five hundred liter, old oak *demi-muids* for ten months prior to bottling. Albillo Real is an indigenous grape to the Sierra de Gredos Mountains, though it also grows in a few other regions of Spain. The 2014 Albillo Real from 4 Monos delivers a fine, complex and fairly exotic bouquet of green olive, lime peel, balsam bough, complex minerality, a touch of straw and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a lovely core, excellent transparency, bright acids and impressive focus and grip on the long, minerally finish. Chablis fans would really enjoy this wine! 2017-2025. **91.**

#### **2014 “Car”- 4 Monos Viticultores (Viños de Madrid- Sierra de Gredos)**

As readers may recall from last year, the “Car” bottling is the Cariñena from 4 Monos, which is a label started by four friends who met a few years ago hiking in the Sierra de Gredos mountains west of Madrid, where they now produce wines. These are thirty year-old bush vines grown in sandy topsoils over a base of granite at elevations from six hundred to twelve hundred meters above sea level. The Cariñena is fermented with whole clusters, indigenous yeasts and

raised in old casks for fifteen months prior to bottling. The 2014 Car is a tad riper than the 2013 version, coming in a half point higher at 12.5 percent octane and offers up a beautiful bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, wild fennel, sarsaparilla and a fine base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and tangy, with excellent balance, a fine core and a very long, transparent and modestly tannic finish. This is already very easy to drink, but it will be even better with a few years' worth of bottle age. An excellent bottle! 2017-2035+. **93.**

**2014 “Cenicientos”- 4 Monos Viticultores (Viños de Madrid- Sierra de Gredos)**

The Cenicientos bottling from 4 Monos takes its name from the village where these old vines are located, high up in the Sierra de Gredos mountains west of Madrid. The wine is a blend of ninety-five percent old vine Garnacha and five percent a mix of Cariñena and Garnacha Blanca. All of these bush vines range from fifty to one hundred years of age and are planted on sandy topsoils over a bed of gneiss and pink granite. The wine is fermented with wild yeasts, whole clusters and has a *cuvaison* of at least a month before being racked into three and five hundred liter, old casks for its twelve months of *elevage*. The wine is beautiful on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a very transparent blend of raspberries, a touch of blood orange, *garrigue*, beautiful soil tones, just a touch of pepper and notes of cloves and sandalwood in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with plenty of stony minerality, moderate, ripe tannins, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex, very nicely balanced finish. Like old school Chateaufort du Pape with a lighter step and even more interesting *terroir*! 2017-2045. **93.**

**2014 La Danza del Viento “Molino Quemado”- 4 Monos Viticultores (Sierra de Gredos)**

The Molino Quemado bottling from 4 Monos is produced from seventy-five year-old Garnacha vines planted in rocky, granitic soils. The wine is fermented with eighty percent whole clusters with indigenous yeasts and aged in older, three and five hundred liter barrels. The bouquet of the 2014 Molino Quemado is excellent, offering superb transparency in its mélange of raspberries, cherries, *garrigue*, spiced meats and a profound base of granite minerality. On the palate the wine is full, spicy and soil-driven, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent complexity, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced young finish. This is a big boy at fully 14.5 percent octane, but it shows superb purity and absolutely no signs of backend heat! Gorgeous Garnacha! 2022-2055. **92.**

**2014 La Danza del Viento “la Isilla”- 4 Monos Viticultores (Sierra de Gredos)**

The 2014 “la Isilla” from 4 Monos Viticultores hails from a very, very old vineyard that is nearly all Garnacha, with just a bit of Cariñena blended in. The vines are over ninety years of age and the parcel was abandoned for many years, with the team at 4 Monos having spent several years resuscitating the vineyard, with 2014 the first year that they have been able to make a wine from the crop. The wine is fermented entirely with whole clusters, indigenous yeasts and spend a year in three hundred liter casks prior to bottling. The 2014 la Isilla offers up a bright and complex bouquet of raspberries, a touch of red currant, lovely minerality, a touch of *garrigue* and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and spicy, with lovely soil inflection, a fine core of fruit, ripe, moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This needs some time in the cellar to soften further, but it will be absolutely outstanding and a very elegant example of Garnacha when it is ready to drink! 2021-2045+. **92+.**

## ***Alicante***

### **2016 Viña Ulises- Gutiérrez de la Vega (Alicante)**

The 2016 Viña Ulises from Gutiérrez de la Vega is composed of a blend of sixty percent Giró and forty percent Monastrell. The wine is impressively low in octane for this region, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol and delivers a fine bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, dark soil tones, a touch of Monastrell's autumnal leafiness, charred wood and espresso. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very soil-driven in personality (particularly for Alicante!), with a fine core, moderate, well-integrated tannins and impressive length and grip on the complex, tangy and quite light on its feet finish. Fine juice that is going to blossom beautifully with some aging, but is already very easy on the palate! This wine is named in tribute to James Joyce. 2017-2035. **91+**.

### **2014 “Cono 4”- Primitivo Quiles**

The Cono 4 bottling from Primitivo Quiles is comprised entirely of Monastrell, with the 2014 vintage coming in at the customary 14.5 percent octane for this cuvée. The wine is deep, ripe and gently raisiny on both the nose and palate, but also complex, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, hung game, *garrigue*, a bit of pepper, sultana raisins and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively transparent for this hot region, with a good core, sound acids and fine focus and grip on the long, moderately tannic and nicely balanced finish. This carries its octane very nicely. 2017-2030+. **88**.

### **2013 Bodegas Curii Tinto- Alberto & Violeta**

The Curii Tinto is an old vine bottling of Garnacha produced up in the mountains of Alicante. The vineyards are all on limestone and the wine is fermented with fifty percent whole clusters and given an old school, leisurely *elevage* of one year in old French *barriques* and an additional year in even older, American oak *foudre* prior to bottling. The 2013 Curii is a stunningly beautiful wine on the nose, offering up an aromatic constellation of raspberries, red currants, eucalyptus, a touch of orange peel, lovely soil tones and a topnote of sandalwood. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with superb depth at the core, lovely complexity, fine focus and a very, very long, moderately tannic and tangy finish. This reminds me of some great, old school California wines from the sixties or seventies, made from a cross of some unknown, old vine field blend and Heitz Martha's Vineyard. It is loaded with personality out of the blocks and also shows the potential for very positive evolution with extended bottle age and I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for a couple of years. This is 14.5 percent octane and yet is fresh, vibrant and seamlessly balanced! 2019-2040. **93+**.

### **2013 Moscatel Dulce “Casta Diva Cosecha Miel”- Gutiérrez de la Vega (Alicante) 500 ml.**

The 2013 Moscatel Dulce “Casta Diva Cosecha Miel” from Gutiérrez de la Vega is barrel fermented in French casks and aged for thirteen months prior to bottling, so it does not see anywhere near the same aging as the 2002 solera version below. Nevertheless, this is a lovely wine, jumping from the glass in a vibrant blend of apricot, nectarine, honey, orange peel and soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and beautifully balanced, with lovely acids to carry the sweetness here, fine focus and a very long, impressively light on its feet and bouncy finish. This is a beautiful wine! 2017-2035. **92+**.



### **2012 Bodegas Curii Tinto- Alberto & Violeta**

The 2012 Curii is another outstanding wine, with the same exotic and extroverted personality on the nose and a gently mellowed palate of a wine that is starting to soften and blossom. The bouquet still jumps from the glass in a mix of eucalyptus, cherries, red currants, beautiful spice tones, a superb base of soil and a touch of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with impressive transparency, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Like the 2013, this wine is also 14.5 percent octane and carries its ripeness with stunning clarity and no signs of heat anywhere to be found! This has mellowed nicely on the backend, as the tannins have started to soften up a bit and it is really not a crime to be drinking it today, though it is only going to improve with further bottle age! 2017-2040. **92+**.

### **2012 Imagine- Gutiérrez de la Vega (Alicante)**

The 2012 Imagine cuvée (dedicated to John Lennon) from Gutiérrez de la Vega is a blend of Syrah, Monastrell and Giró and comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol, which is not too bad at all for the very warm region of Alicante. The bouquet of the 2012 is deep and complex, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of black cherries, chicory, a lovely base of soil, dried black raspberries, a touch of *garrigue* and a topnote of cola. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, complex and gently chewy finish. Even at five years of age this wine is still a bit on the young side and needs another three or four years in the cellar to fully blossom, but it will be an excellent wine when it is ready to drink! 2020-2045. **91+**.

### **2010 Principe de Salinas- Gutiérrez de la Vega (Alicante)**

The 2010 Principe de Salinas from Gutiérrez de la Vega is composed entirely of Monastrell, with the wine aged in one-third new French casks for fourteen months prior to bottling. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of cassis, roasted game, a touch of cola, dark soil tones, coffee grounds and charred wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and robust in personality, with a fine core, tangy acids, ripe tannins and a long, complex and gently heady finish. This is fourteen percent octane, which is low by the standards of Alicante, but the wine broad shouldered and plenty muscular in style. 2017-2035+. **88**.

### **2010 Rojo y Negro- Gutiérrez de la Vega (Alicante)**

The 2010 Rojo y Negro from Gutiérrez de la Vega in a single varietal bottling of Giró (Garnacha) made from forty year-old vines. This wine is also raised in one-third new French casks for fourteen months prior to bottling, as is the Principe de Salinas cuvée. The 2010 Rojo y Negro is a touch lower in octane than the above wine, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a fine nose of black raspberries, *garrigue*, a touch of chocolate, roasted meats, a fine base of salty soil tones and a touch of licorice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with plenty of depth and muscle, ripe tannins and fine length and grip on the roasted finish. This is classically Alicante in style and very, very well done in the traditionally more powerful style of the region. Fine juice. 2017-2035+. **90**.

### **2002 Moscatel Dulce “Casta Diva Reserva Real”- Gutiérrez de la Vega (Alicante) 500 ml.**

The Moscatel Dulce from Gutiérrez de la Vega is made in a solera system and was aged for nine years in barrel prior to bottling. The 2002 version is a beautiful golden orange color and offers up a complex bouquet of marinated orange peel, apricot, incipient tea leaves, a touch of cigar wrapper, lavender and honey. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and

beautifully balanced, with a fine core, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the very complex and zesty finish. This is fourteen percent octane, but carries it very well indeed. Very hard juice to spit! 2017-2035. **93.**

**1987 Monastrell Dulce “Recóndita Armonía”- Gutiérrez de la Vega (Alicante) 500 ml.**

The 1987 Monastrell Dulce “Recóndita Armonía” from Gutiérrez de la Vega is an absolutely brilliant wine, offering up a deep, spicy and complex nose of sultana raisins, candied orange peel, an exotic note of fresh peppermint, lovely soil tones, a touch of lavender, dried eucalyptus and barley sugar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, sweet and beautifully balanced, with bottomless depth at the core, really good acids for its fourteen percent octane, exquisite balance and focus and a very, very long and complex finish. This is like an old Port in some aspects (though it is not fortified), but with all these exotic spice tones soaring from the glass in a completely unique and captivating style. No wonder Felipe Gutiérrez de la Vega is a legend in Alicante for his dessert wines! 2017-2040. **95.**



*Very old, ungrafted, Listán Blanco vines of the Monje family, propped up off the ground. (© Ross Maloof)*

***Canary Islands Blanco***

**2016 Diego Seco- Bodegas Bermejo (Lanzarote)**

The 2016 version of Diego Seco from Bodegas Bermejo is beautifully made and offers up plenty of bounce and soil signature in its medium-full format. The nose wafts from the glass in a mix of lime, green apple, sea salts and a topnote of green olive. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and transparent, with very good balance, bright acids and impressive grip and focus on the long finish, that closes with a distinctive touch of green olive. 2017-2025. **90.**

**2015 Diego Seco- Bodegas Bermejo (Lanzarote)**

The 2015 Diego Seco (Diego is a white wine grape that was introduced to the Canary Islands in the fifteenth century from Andalucía, from where it has now virtually disappeared) from Bodegas Bermejo is a lovely middleweight that is absolutely loaded with minerality from the volcanic soils of Lanzarote. The bouquet offers up a fine mix of lemon, dried flowers, a bit of sea salt and a touch of paraffin. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with lovely focus and grip, a fine core and a nice touch of brininess perking up the long and snappy finish. A terrific partner at the table! 2017-2025+? **90.**

**2015 Malvasía Volcánica Seco- Bodegas Bermejo (Lanzarote)**

The 2015 Malvasía Volcánica Seco from Bodegas Bermejo is excellent. This grape is an indigenous cross of Malvasía Aromática and Marmajuelo and is found nowhere else in the world, outside of the Canaries. The 2015 version wafts from the glass in a fine blend of pink grapefruit, tart pear, lovely minerality, spring flowers, hints of the beeswax to come and a touch of green olive in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and beautifully transparent, with crisp acids, a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, dancing and complex finish. This is an excellent middleweight. 2017-2025+. **91+.**

**2015 Blanco D- Crater (Tenerife)**

The Blanco D bottling from Crater is a blend of eighty percent Listán Blanco and twenty percent Malvasía Aromática, with the wine fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. The 2015 iteration delivers a lovely nose of white peach, a touch of honeysuckle, complex, salty soil tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush at the core, with sound acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Like so many whites of the Canaries, this too closes with that nice touch of slightly bitter fruit peel on the backend, which works so nicely with food. 2017-2021. **89.**

**2015 Táganán Blanco- Envínate (Tenerife)**

The Táganán Blanco bottling is a joint project of the Envínate team and fifteen different families growing grapes on the northern side of the island of Tenerife, with these parcels planted with very old vines- most of which are no longer capable of identification. This is a very old-fashioned wine, as the vineyards grow wild along the ground and hanging over cliff faces, varying in elevation from seventy-five to three hundred meters above sea level and no one is really sure of what is planted here anymore, though there is certainly Listán Blanco, Albillo Criollo and Malvasía included here, amongst other varieties. The 2015 Táganán Blanco is excellent, once it has a chance to blossom (decanting is definitely recommended here when the wine is young), offering up a complex bouquet of pineapple, lemon, salty minerality, bergamot, incipient notes of beeswax and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, vibrant and full-bodied, with a youthful gloss of puppy fat, lovely focus and grip and a long, soil-driven and nascently complex finish. This is still a young wine, but the acidity seems a tad lower in this vintage than is the case with the 2014 and this wine may drink at its peak a few years sooner as a result. A fine bottle. 2017-2025. **93.**

**2015 Albillo Criollo- Bodega Matías i Torres (La Palma)**

The 2015 Albillo Criollo from Bodega Matías i Torres is produced from thirty year-old vines and fermented with indigenous yeasts in a very classical style. Victoria Torres currently runs this small family winery, which only began bottling commercially in 1999, as prior to this they produced a bit of wine for the family and sold off the rest in bulk. The wine spends six months in stainless steel prior to bottling and the 2015 offers up a beautifully expressive bouquet of lime peel, salty minerality, a touch of green olive, gentle botanicals and a topnote of

lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with superb complexity, bright acids and a very long, soil-driven and zesty finish. There is a lovely element of wildness here that adds drama to both the nose and palate and this is an absolutely superb bottle of wine! 2017-2025+. **93.**

**2015 Tajinaste Blanco (Tenerife)**

The Tajinaste Blanco is a blend of ninety percent Listán Blanco and ten percent Albillo Criollo, with the wine fermented in stainless steel and aged for a few months in two and three year-old barrels prior to bottling. The 2015 Tajinaste Blanco delivers a fine and nicely discreet aromatic constellation of bread fruit, a touch of green olive, salty soil tones, lime peel and hints of the beeswax to come in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely light on its feet, with a fine core, sound acids and very good length and grip on the youthfully complex finish. This is a very elegant and classy bottle. 2017-2025. **90.**

**2015 Diego- Bodega Matías i Torres (La Palma)**

The Diego bottling from Victoria Torres is a single vineyard wine (denoted by a black dot on the front label) that is planted with sixty year-old vines at eight hundred meters above sea level, on very low pergolas that help protect the grapes from the constant trade-winds on La Palma. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and spends seven months on its fine lees prior to bottling. The 2015 Diego offers up plenty of personality on the nose, jumping from the glass in an exotic mix of lemon peel, salty minerality, chamomile, dried flowers and a touch of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and soil-driven, with a good core, lovely focus and grip and very good length on the well-balanced finish. There is a nice touch of blossoming botanicals on the finish that promise yet another layer of complexity with a bit of bottle age. Lovely juice. 2017-2027. **92.**

**2015 Gual- Bodegas Viñátigo (Tenerife)**

The 2015 Gual from Bodegas Viñátigo (Bual is this grape's name in Madeira, where it is more familiar) is fermented and aged in stainless steel prior to bottling. The wine delivers a fine and exotic nose of green oranges, pineapple, salty minerality, citrus peel and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite assertive in personality, with a rock solid core, bright acids and fine length and grip on the complex finish that closes with a distinct touch of citrus peel. This is no wall flower! 2017-2025+. **88.**

**2015 Listán Blanco- Bodegas Viñátigo (Tenerife)**

The Bodegas Viñátigo is run by Juan Jesus and his wife Elena Batista, with Juan a professor of viticulture by day and Elena overseeing much of the day to day viticultural work (she also has a Master's Degree in Oenology) and the two sharing responsibilities in the cellar. Their 2015 Listán Blanco is produced from hundred year-old vines that are trained on pergolas (Albariño style) and fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of lime, tart pear, a touch of walnut, salty soil tones and a topnote of ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is even more expressive than the youthful nose suggest, with its full-bodied format delivering lovely complexity, a fine core, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a very fine bottle. 2017-2027. **91.**

**2015 Marmajuelo- Bodegas Viñátigo (Tenerife)**

The Marmajuelo from Bodegas Viñátigo is produced entirely from this little known, indigenous white wine grape from the Canary Islands. Proprietor Juan Jesus ferments and ages this entirely in stainless steel, with a few months spent on the fine lees. The 2015 Marmajuelo offers up a really pretty and perfumed bouquet of peach, musk-melon, acacia blossoms, a touch of fresh rosemary and plenty of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure,

full-bodied and loaded with personality, with more soil signature than what comes through on the nose, a good core, sound acids and impressive length and grip on the ripe and extroverted finish. This is 13.5 percent octane and it is just a touch heady on the finish, but there is an awful lot to like here! 2017-2023+? **89+**.

#### **2014 Táganan Blanco- Envínate (Tenerife)**

The 2014 Táganan Blanco is again fairly reductive when first opened (this was also the case with the 2013 iteration), but with some coaxing offers up a fine aromatic blend of pear, salty minerality, a touch of quince, the gentle nuttiness of Malvasía and orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and youthful, with a lovely core, superb soil signature, great focus and grip and a very long, youthfully complex finish. I have mentioned in the past that there is a textural similarity here to the wines of Jean-François Coche and this is once again evident in the 2014. This is utterly unique and truly lovely wine! 2017-2030+. **93**.

#### **2014 Táganan “Parcela Amogoje” Blanco- Envínate (Tenerife)**

The Parcela Amogoje Blanco from Envínate is a wild, old field blend that includes grapes such as Albillo Criollo, Marmajuelo, Malvasia and several others, though no one is quite sure what is really planted here, as the vines are well over one hundred years of age. The 2014 Parcela Amogoje delivers a simply superb bouquet of pear, apple, iodine, hazelnuts, salty soil tones, dried flowers, hints of candied lemon peel and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and seamlessly balanced, with great acids, a fine core, laser-like focus and a very, very long, complex and vibrant finish. This is stunning wine! 2017-2030+. **95**.

#### **2014 Malvasía Aromática- Bodega Matías i Torres (La Palma)**

Malvasía Aromática is typically made into a late harvest, sweet wine on the Canary Islands, but the autumn growing conditions were not conducive to this in 2014, so Victoria Torres decided to pick the grapes earlier and just make a dry wine in this year. The wine has turned out quite nicely, offering up an exotic bouquet of dried peach, fresh apricot, a touch of honeycomb, beeswax and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, vibrant and fairly complex, with good focus and balance and a long, classy finish that closes with a touch of backend bitterness that is really appealing at the table. 2017-2025. **89+**.

#### **2014 Forestera Blanca “Paisaje de las Islas”- Tajinaste (La Gomera)**

The “Paisaje de las Islas” label from Tajinaste is a new project started by Agustín García of Tajinaste to produce wines from purchased grapes that are emblematic of the islands from which they hail. Forestera Blanca is a grape that grows on the island of La Gomera and Agustín’s 2014 version is excellent, delivering a complex bouquet of pear, dried apricot, salty soil tones, a dollop of fresh almond and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, ripe and zesty, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is a big-boned wine, coming in at fourteen percent octane, but it is impeccably balanced. 2017-2025. **92**.

#### **2003 Listán Blanco- Monje (Tenerife)**

This is a special bottling of Listán Blanco from Monje, as the family only produces this long-aged cuvée in top years when they have need of some new barrels for the cellar. When the combination of a high quality vintage and a need for new casks in the cellar arises, the Monje family will make this particular bottling, which breaks in the new barrels with eight months of aging for the Listán Blanco (some older casks are also used, so the wine is not too oaky) and

Felipe Monje will then age the wine for fully ten years in bottle prior to its release, “to allow the new oak to fully integrate in the wine.” Consequently, the 2003 is the current release for this rare bottling and it is drinking beautifully, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of tangerine, butter, gentle notes of honeycomb, dried flowers and hazelnuts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, impressive focus and grip, zesty acids and a long, classy and *à point* finish. This is a superb example of a fully mature Listán Blanco that still has plenty of future life ahead of it. 2017-2027+. **92.**

### ***Canary Islands Rosado***

#### **2016 Rosado- Frontón de Oro (Gran Canaria)**

The 2016 Rosado from Frontón de Oro is comprised entirely of Listán Negro, but this wine develops its lovely, pale salmon color by twenty-four hours of maceration with the skins prior to racking and pressing. The wine is very, very pretty on the nose, offering up scents of strawberries, blood orange, a dollop of salty soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and juicy, with a good core and just a whisper of attractive backend bitterness that defines so many of the wines of the Canary Islands. This is not the most complex Rosado, but it hits all the right buttons and is very quaffable. 2017-2020. **88.**

#### **2016 Rosado- Tajinaste (Tenerife)**

Tajinaste’s 2016 Rosado is composed entirely of Listán Negro and is made by the *saignée* method. This is an outstanding example of Rosado, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of dried red berries, a touch of pepper, really terrific soil signature, white cherries, violets and a touch of fruit-skin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and very elegant in profile, with impressive complexity, a good core and a long, poised and zesty finish. This is fermented with indigenous yeasts and as a result, it seems to be a cut above its compatriots in complexity. Fine Rosado! 2017-2023. **92.**

#### **2016 Listán Negro Rosado- Bodegas Viñátigo (Tenerife)**

The Listán Negro Rosado from Bodegas Viñátigo is also made by the *saignée* method and the 2016 version wafts from the glass in a stylish aromatic constellation of dried cherries, orange peel, a touch of pepper, gentle smokiness and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and juicy, with a good core, bright acids and good grip on the long finish. This is very, very easy to drink! 2017-2020+. **89.**

#### **2015 Listán Negro Rosado- Bodegas Bermejo (Lanzarote- Canary Islands)**

The 2015 Listán Negro Rosado from Bodegas Bermejo is very pale in color and offers up a very pretty bouquet of rose petals, melon, cherry skin and a lovely base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and succulent, with lovely soil signature, sound framing acids and very good length and grip on the vibrant finish. This cries out for food to reach full expression and is really a tasty bottle of Rosado. 2017-2022. **90.**

### ***Canary Islands Tinto***

#### **2015 Táganan Tinto- Envínate (Tenerife)**

The 2015 Táganan Tinto from Envínate (produced from an ancient, mystery field blend and volcanic soils) comes in at a cool thirteen percent octane and offers up beautiful transparency on both the nose and palate. The bouquet delivers a constellation of dark berries, chicory, a fine base of soil, a touch of exotic botanicals and a nice touch of tree bark up high. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with a fine core, excellent soil signature,

zesty acids and a long, gently tannic and complex finish. This is drinking beautifully out of the blocks and will also age very well indeed. 2017-2035. **93.**

**2015 Táganan “Parcela Margalagua” Tinto- Envínate (Tenerife)**

The 2015 Táganan “Parcela Margalagua” from Envínate is a beautiful wine that fully does justice to the potential of these centenarian vines. As I have mentioned in past notes on this wine, this is a field blend that includes Listán Negro and Negramoll, amongst a fairly large number of other grape varieties. The 2015 Parcela Margalagua is outstanding (somehow I missed tasting the 2014 version!), offering up a deep, complex and beautifully focused bouquet of desiccated dark berries, chicory, discreet botanicals, a complex base of volcanic soil, a touch of pepper, a hint of tree bark and a topnote of red curry. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very, very transparent, with a lovely core, bright acids, modest, beautifully integrated tannins, laser-like focus and superb length and grip on the seamless and nascently complex finish. This is a beautiful bottle of wine in the making. 2017-2045+. **94+.**

**2015 Negramoll- Bodega Matías i Torres (La Palma)**

Victoria Torres has plenty of old vine Negramoll to work with in this bottling, with the vines ranging from thirty years of age all the way up to one hundred and twenty year-old vines! Fifty percent of the grapes are destemmed, everything is foot-trodden and vinified with indigenous yeasts and raised in older casks for six months prior to bottling. The 2015 Negramoll offers up a vibrant and complex bouquet of raspberries, a touch of fruitcake, tree bark, a lovely base of volcanic soil, chicory, beautiful spice tones (turmeric?) and a hint of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and impressively transparent, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, tangy acids and a long, moderately tannic and beautifully balanced finish. This has a fine sense of elegance and tremendous backend energy. Fine, fine juice and an absolute steal in price! 2017-2035+. **93+.**

**2015 Listán Negro “La Hollera”- Monje (Tenerife)**

The La Hollera bottling of Listán Negro from the Monje family is a single vineyard wine produced from forty to sixty year-old vines and fermented by carbonic maceration with marvelous results. The bouquet on the 2015 is vibrant and complex, jumping from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, lovely botanicals, a touch of hazelnut, volcanic soil and a gentle topnote of fresh-brewed coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with impressive backend mineral drive, a fine core, moderate tannins and a very long, classy finish that shows fine focus and grip. This is really a terrific bottle! 2017-2040. **93+.**

**2015 Artífice Tinto- Borja Pérez (Tenerife)**

The 2015 Artífice Tinto from Borja Pérez is a blend of ninety percent Listán Negro and five percent each of Vijariego Negro and Baboso. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and aged in old Burgundy casks. The 2015 Artífice is light in color and offers up a fine and soil-infused nose of desiccated berries, chicory, complex volcanic soil tones, a touch of tree bark and a lovely, gentle topnote of Listán Negro botanicals. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and very much defined by its underlying soil complexity, with a good core, bright acids, melting tannins and excellent length and grip on the very nicely balanced finish. This is lovely juice and a superb introduction to the red wines of Tenerife. 2017-2035. **90.**

**2015 Tajinaste “Tradicional” Tinto (Tenerife)**

The Tinto Tradicional from Tajinaste is made entirely from Listán Negro, with twenty percent of the cuvée vinified by carbonic maceration and thirty percent raised in older American oak casks for a few months prior to blending and bottling. The 2015 is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex aromatic blend of sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, chicory, beautiful soil



tones and a gentle botanical topnote redolent of balsam boughs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with lovely soil signature, a fine core, gentle tannins, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. This is impressively light on its feet. 2017-2035. 92.



*The untrained vines trailing along the volcanic soils in Victoria Torres' vineyards on La Palma (© Sarah Gallaher)*

### **2015 Listán Negro Tinto- Bodegas Viñátigo (Tenerife)**

The Listán Negro from Bodegas Viñátigo is fermented in stainless and then spends three months of its *elevage* in older French and American oak casks. The 2015 is excellent, offering up a superb bouquet of dark berries, a touch of grilled meats, cinnamon, lovely soil tones, a hint of vanillin oak and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and light on

its feet, with tangy acids, fine focus and grip, just a touch of backend tannin on the long and complex finish. With extended air, a very gentle Canary Islands touch of botanicals adds just another layer of complexity to the aromatic profile here. This is a beautifully made wine and a stunning value! 2017-2030. **91.**

#### **2014 Tinto- Crater (Tenerife)**

This is the only red wine bottling from Crater. It is comprised of a blend of sixty percent Negramoll and forty percent Listán Negro, with ten percent of the blend raised in new French casks and the remainder in one to three wine barrels. This is a bit different stylistically than many of the Canary Islands red that I tasted for this report, as the wine undergoes a fifteen day “cold soak” prior to the onset of fermentation, which gives the wine a sappiness that is quite unique in my experience with these wines. The 2014 Crater Tinto is a lovely wine that is still quite primary and will need a bit of cellaring to unlock its secondary layers of complexity, as today its youthful nose is a fine, sappy blend of black cherries, plums, chicory, dark soil tones, a touch of botanicals, cola and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a fine core, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and primary finish. Give this three or four years in the cellar to allow the added layers of complexity to emerge and then drink it over the ensuing couple of decades. It will a superb bottle. 2020-2045+. **93.**

#### **2014 Táganan Tinto- Envínate (Tenerife)**

What I like about the wines from Envínate (besides their absolutely stellar quality) is that they always credit on their labels the vineyard owners who they assist in farming and purchase the grapes from to make their wines, with their Táganan Tinto bottling hailing from old vines owned by the Sosa and De La Rosa families. As I mentioned in the note on the 2015 version of this bottling, no one knows anymore what varieties are in these very old vineyards, but they certainly produce great wine! The 2014 offers up a deep and very classy bouquet of cassis, desiccated black cherries, bonfire, a touch of *garrigue*, dark volcanic soil tones, chicory and the first vestiges of the botanicals to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and intensely flavored, with a lovely core, excellent transparency, modest tannins, tangy acids and great focus and grip on the very long and complex finish. This is simply a stunning middleweight! 2017-2040+. **94.**

#### **2014 Táganan “Parcela Margalagua” Tinto- Envínate (Tenerife)**

The Parcela Margalagua bottling from Envínate hails from the centenarian, ungrafted and untrained vines of farmer José Angel Alonso. There are no real records of what grapes are planted here, but the field blend probably includes virtually every red grape on the islands! The 2014 version is going to be excellent, but it could do with a bit of bottle age to allow the wine to blossom a bit from behind its fine structure. The bouquet starts out a bit tight and reductive, but a bit of swirling delivers a fine and quite complex mélange of red berries, pepper, tree bark, Canary Island botanicals, coffee grounds, bitter cherry and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and very transparent in profile, with a fine core, tangy acids and moderate tannins on the long, youthful finish. The focus and balance here are impeccable, but this wine is still tight and will need some time in the cellar to start to drink with generosity. However, it will be outstanding when it is ready to drink. 2022-2050. **93.**

#### **2014 Tintilla- Frontón de Oro (Gran Canaria)**

The 2014 Tintilla from Frontón de Oro is fermented in stainless steel and raised for four months in old, American oak casks prior to bottling. This is one of the ripest wines I have tried from the Canaries, coming in at a full 14.5 percent octane, yet is perfectly balanced and shows

absolutely no signs of backend heat on the palate! The bouquet is a lovely blend of sweet dark berries, chicory, gentle botanicals, bonfire, dark volcanic soils and just a hint of oak somewhere in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and not particularly broad-shouldered (which I was somewhat expecting, considering its octane!), with a lovely core, melting tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long and tasty finish. I am guessing that at its higher level of alcohol, this may not age quite as long as several of these other red wines from the Canary Islands, but I have absolutely zero experience with the Tintilla grape from here and it may end up with a longer bottle life than I anticipate. It is a very well-made and tasty wine. 2017-2035. **90.**

**2014 Listán Negro “Tradicional”- Monje (Tenerife)**

The 2014 Listán Negro “Tradicional” is a fine follow-up on the 2013 I reported on in the last issue. Between the two issues, I was able to find out the age of those extremely old *foudres* that are used to raise this wine, which happen to be fully two hundred years old and were originally used for rum production back when the world was young. The bouquet on the 2014 Tradicional is deep and complex, delivering a blend of dark berries, black plums, charred wood, coffee grounds, really lovely botanicals and a fine base of volcanic soil. On the palate the wine is pure, complex and nicely full, with exquisite balance, fine soil signature and lovely length and grip on the gently tannic finish. This is every bit as fine as the excellent 2013 and is another excellent value! 2017-2035. **92.**

***Canary Islands Sweet Wines***

**2008 Malvasía Aromática- Bodegas Viñátigo (Tenerife)**

The 2008 Malvasía Aromática from Viñátigo is a pretty wine, but the late-harvest style here has resulted in a pretty heady wine, coming in at a full fifteen percent and there is a touch of heat on the backend as a result. The bouquet is a stylish mix of orange peel, honey, fresh apricot, volcanic soil and a touch of Fino-like nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a fine core, plenty of fruit and a long, zesty and nicely focused finish. If it were not for the octane, this would be outstanding, rather than very good, but perhaps this is just the traditional style of wines of this genre on the Canaries. 2017-2030+. **89.**

**Malvasía “Naturalmante Dulce”- Bodegas Bermejo (Lanzarote)**

The Malvasía “Naturalmante Dulce” from Bodegas Bermejo is made in the solera style, which is why this bottling bears no vintage date. The current release is really lovely, wafting from the glass in a complex mix of apricot, honey, orange peel, a touch of tea leaves, salty soil tones and toasted hazelnuts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, and impressively zesty, with fine focus and grip, impeccable balance and a long, complex finish. This comes in at fourteen percent octane, which seems far more suited to the wine than the fifteen in the above. 2017-2035. **93.**

***Portugal***

**2012 Monte Velho- Herdade do Esporão (Alentejo)**

The 2012 Monte Velho from Herdade do Esporão is composed of a blend of forty percent Aragonez, thirty-five percent Trincadeira, twenty percent Touriga Nacional and five percent Syrah and comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol in this vintage. The bouquet is ripe, but also deep and complex, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet cassis, dark soil tones, black pepper, new leather and a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and suave on the attack, with a plump core, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the ever so

slightly hot finish. It is only the touch of backend, uncovered alcohol here that keeps its score down a bit, as the constituent components are really lovely, with the Touriga Nacional component showing particularly well in the mix. 2016-2025. **88.**

**1992 Vinho Tinto- Francisco Figueiredo (Colares)**

The 1992 Vinho Tinto from Francisco Figueiredo is a beautiful bottle of wine that is now at its apogee of peak drinkability. The wine is a cool customer, only mounting to eleven percent alcohol, but utterly complete on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a fine, fine blend of dark berries, cigar ash, black walnuts, a dollop of road tar, charred wood, gentle notes of *sous bois* and a touch of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and intensely flavored, with fine focus and grip, tangy acids and impeccable balance on the long, poised and light on its feet finish. Fine, fine juice. 2017-2030+. **93.**