

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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CHÂTEAU TROTANOY ONE OF POMEROL'S TRUE FIRST GROWTH ESTATES



Château Trotanoy is one of the greatest estates in all of Bordeaux, as well as one of the top two or three properties in the illustrious commune of Pomerol. The vineyards at Trotanoy date all the way back to 1761, when the first vines were planted here, and for much of the early history of the estate, it was owned by the important Right Bank family of the Girauds, who were some of the very largest landowners in Pomerol in the Eighteenth Century. Until very recently, the Giraud family name still lived on in Pomerol within the name of the estate of Château Certan-Giraud, but this was sold a few years back to the Moueix family, who renamed the estate Château Hosanna. In fact, in its earliest commercial days, the wine of Trotanoy was sold as “Pomerol Giraud Cru de Trotanoy”. Like other important Right Bank estates (such as Figeac), Trotanoy was once considerably larger than it is today, totaling fully twenty-five hectares of vines in the latter half of the nineteenth century, but by the close of that century, parcels were already being sold off by the Giraud family, and this practice continued during the first half of the twentieth century, until we eventually arrive at the present day size of Trotanoy at 7.6 hectares under vine. Descendants of the Giraud family held onto Trotanoy all the way up to the first few years after the Second World War, when they eventually had to sell the property to the Pecresse family, who owned Trotanoy for less than a decade, when it was purchased in 1953 by Jean-Pierre Moueix. Since 1953, Château Trotanoy has been one of the crown jewels in the Moueix family’s Pomerol holdings.

Interestingly, despite Trotanoy's illustrious history, the estate has kept a relatively low profile in the firmament of Bordeaux during the last quarter of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, and it is only of late that the current owners of the property, the Moueix family, have sought to give the wine a bit more recognition in the wide world of Pomerol fame. For much of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, the two Pomerol properties of Trotanoy and Vieux Château Certan were the most famous in the commune- by quite a wide margin- and were universally considered the greatest wines produced in Pomerol. At this time, they were far more highly regarded for their wines than superstar estates such as Château Pétrus or Château Lafleur for instance, and it was only in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s that other estates' reputations in Pomerol began to catch up with those of Château Trotanoy and Vieux Château Certan. However, despite the relative lack of name recognition of Château Trotanoy from the 1970s forward, the wines have always been superb examples of this great *terroir* and amongst the very greatest produced in Bordeaux. There has been some reports in journalistic circles that Trotanoy fell into a bit of a slump during the period from 1976 to 1989 (with the exception of the universally-praised 1982 from this estate), producing lighter-styled wines, but in fact, this is clearly erroneous and to my palate the wines have never missed a beat during the period in question. In fact, today, upon tasting many of the wines from this period of time, one actually comes to the conclusion that Château Trotanoy was one of the most brilliant producers in all of Bordeaux from 1976 to 1989 and probably had as fine a record in weaker vintages as anyone on either side of the Gironde.

The present day vineyards of Château Trotanoy are located on the far western end of the plateau of Pomerol, just north of the tiny hamlet of Catusseau, with the vast majority of the *terroir* here a mix of deep clay and gravel, with a strong vein of iron running through the soils as well (which is also found in the vineyards of two of the other Right bank superstar classicists: Vieux Château Certan and Figeac). Christian Moueix describes the soils at Trotanoy as fifty percent deep gravel mixed with clay, with the other half a dense black clay layered over a broad subsoil of iron. A small percentage of Trotanoy's vines are located on the slopes of the plateau, rather than up on the plateau proper, but the heart and soul of the estate's *vignobles* are true Pomerol plateau in origin. There is decidedly more gravel in the soils of the plateau vineyards of Trotanoy than say, for instance, at Château Pétrus, and this gravel base in the soils can very much be felt in the wines of Trotanoy- particularly in cooler years. The strong signature of gravel in the wines adds an additional element of complexity to the wine here in less successful vintages, and is also quite useful in wetter years, where the vineyards drain better than many of the estates further to the east on the Pomerol plateau that have a higher concentration of clay in their respective *terroirs*. The iron in the soils here is also very much in evidence in the wines of Trotanoy (as is the case with other Right Bank properties such as VCC and Figeac that also have a high ferrous content in their vineyards), and one suspects that the iron in the soils here plays a role in producing the classic "iron fist in the velvet glove" style of Trotanoy in so many vintages. Keep in mind that in Burgundy, the vineyard of Musigny also has a relatively high iron content in the soil and the wines here are also typically very long-lived (as are the wines at Trotanoy) and yet quite velvety in texture at full maturity (again sharing similarities with the wines of Trotanoy).

Château Trotanoy's nearest (famous) vineyard neighbors these days are Château Le Pin (immediately to the southeast of Trotanoy in the direction of Catusseau), Château Certan-de-May and Vieux Château Certan due east on the plateau, and Châteaux Hosanna and Pétrus just to the north of Certan-de-May and VCC. However, there are several smaller Pomerol estates that lie immediately to the north of Trotanoy, including Château la Cabanne, Château Gombaude-Guilhot, Château Bourgneuf, but their vineyards generally lie on the slopes, rather than on the plateau proper and are more sandy than those of most of Trotanoy's parcels and these wines do not tend to have the same depth or aging potential as their most illustrious neighbor. Since the 2009 vintage, Château Trotanoy has begun to produce a second wine, called *Espérance de Trotanoy*, of which annual production is usually about five hundred cases. This leaves about two thousand cases a year of the *grand vin* produced on average at Trotanoy, and the combined 2,500 cases of the first and second wines at Trotanoy these days is down slightly from the 3,500 case per year that were produced here in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s (part of the so-called golden age here prior to the alleged slump at the estate), as yields at the property are down a bit from that era (with routine green harvesting now practiced in the vineyards) and selection is a bit more strict in this day and age than was the case formerly here.

The vineyards of Trotanoy have been planted to ninety percent merlot and ten percent cabernet franc for several generations, and I have always enjoyed the contribution that the cabernet franc adds to the blend here in terms of complexity and additional, structural integrity. The vineyards of Trotanoy were very fortuitous in the early years of the Moueix ownership of the estate, as the killer freeze of 1956 that harmed a great many Pomerol estates in this winter (and required extensive replanting at many of Trotanoy's neighbors) did not hurt the vines at Trotanoy, so that there are several sections of the *vignobles* here that are planted with vines in excess of sixty years of age. This is quite rare in Pomerol. However, there has been a fair bit of replanting in the vineyards at Trotanoy during the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, so that the overall average of the vines is around thirty-five years of age these days. As Trotanoy lies at the extreme western edge of the plateau of Pomerol, there is a decided drop off in quality and structure of the wines produced at properties further to the west of the estate. The Trotanoy portion of vines that lie also on the slopes of the plateau used to be routinely reserved for the Moueix firm's generic and inexpensive Pomerol bottling, but beginning in the 2009 vintage, the quality was viewed as sufficiently fine to launch the *Espérance de Trotanoy* second wine.

Château Trotanoy is one of the longest-lived wines in all of Pomerol and is typically very slow to unfold, so that it is often only in the fleshier vintages that the young wine shows a lot of generosity out of the blocks. This is probably why some commentators have downplayed the quality of some young vintages like the 1983 or 1985, as these years in Pomerol generally did not provide a lot of youthful, puppy fat fruit to buffer the inherent structure of young Trotanoy, and the wines can often be misread early on as a result. However, with enough patience, it is a very rare vintage of Trotanoy that does not fully blossom and become an absolute reference point wine in the true character of its respective vintage in Pomerol. This is an important point to focus upon when trying to understand Trotanoy's rightful place in the firmament of Pomerol in this day and age, as it is all too frequent presently for commentators on Bordeaux to want every single vintage to offer up the easy to read, fleshy muscle of a vintage like 1982- regardless of the actual vintage characteristics- and are often perfectly happy to countenance all sorts of cellar manipulations (malo in new oak, micro-oxygenation, use of extraction enzymes, concentrators or

reverse osmosis) to try and undo what Mother Nature has defined stylistically in so many of these less well-endowed vintages (and which often bear no *natural* resemblance to years like 1982). To my mind, it is far more aesthetically pleasing, not to mention, intellectually stimulating, for estates to aspire to the maximum expression of quality within the natural stylistic constraints of each and every given vintage and to accurately portray the beauty of their underlying *terroir* through the prisms of these widely varying growing seasons, rather than to simply trot out the extraction gizmos in the cellar in lighter years and manipulate their raw materials to produce cookie cutter wines of fat fruit and broad shoulders by whatever means necessary. But, this is my perspective, and as we all know, others view Bordeaux entirely differently! Happily, the history of Trotanoy is one of accurate and high quality reflections of the actual vintages in question, rather than overly-manipulated wines of fat, facile simplicity.

This is one of the beauties of Trotanoy over the last thirty or forty years, as they have invariably made outstanding examples of almost every vintage (at least in those which I have had the pleasure to taste) that faithfully represent the high water mark of potential within the context of each and every growing season. Take for example the decade of the 1980s, where the conventional wisdom in some circles is that Trotanoy was in a modest slump and the only really compelling wine produced here during this decade was the powerful 1982. However, upon a bit of reflection, this assertion does not really hold up particularly well. First of all, one has to take a look at the relative quality of the vintages of the 1980s in Pomerol. Certainly 1982 and 1989 were ripe and highly successful vintages that produced relatively powerful wines (what some folks called a return to the more muscular style of the Pomerols of yesteryear- though perhaps they might more accurately have been portrayed as harbingers of the contemporary Pomerol vintages we have seen of late in this era of global warming). However, the rest of the decade of the 1980s in Pomerol was certainly not flush with powerfully-styled vintages, as even the superb 1985 vintage is really a year that “naturally” trades on perfumed complexity and silky elegance, rather than on great muscle or bottomless depth. There are a few truly great, “big and bold” 1985 Pomerol classics- Château Lafleur immediately comes to mind- but for the most part, the most successful wines of this vintage in Pomerol are far more elegant and understated than their 1982 or 1989 counterparts. Many other of the great 1985 Pomerols (and this is clearly one of my favorite vintages in recent memory here)- Pétrus, La Conseillante, Trotanoy, Certan-de-May or l’Evangile- are not particularly big or opulent wines, but rather velvety wines of great inner harmony and complexity- and most are still decidedly on the young side and continue to put on weight and show even more serious structural elements as they blossom with bottle age.

Other vintages of the 1980s in Pomerol are more of the middling level: 1981, 1983, 1986 and 1988 can all be termed “fair to good vintages” in the region, but no one would point to a vintage like 1983 in Pomerol and say that it was singled out for success in this year the way the commune of Margaux was in this vintage. It is a perfectly solid Pomerol year where generally, some good, respectable middleweights were produced, and within the context of the vintage’s character, the really very fine quality of the ’83 Trotanoy stands out as one of the ringing successes of the vintage in the commune. Similar things can be said for the 1981, 1986 and 1988 Trotanoys, as all of these wines are exceptional examples of their respective vintages and very true to the growing seasons’ characteristics. Certainly none of these vintages will ever make one forget the 1975 or the 1961 Trotanoy, but all of them are beautifully made wines that show off the *terroir* of Trotanoy to great advantage within the context of their respective vintage styles. To

me, this is what makes Trotanoy one of the greatest wines in all of Bordeaux, as it is not solely dependent on muscle and opulent fruit to define its greatness, and in fact, at least over the first two or three decades of its life in bottle, it is often the so-called “lesser” vintages that supply the most complexity and pleasure in the glass. At this point in time, I am perfectly happy drinking the 1982 Trotanoy (though it is still really a baby and only shows a vestige of what it will be at full maturity), but I derive at least equal pleasure from bottles of the 1981 or 1979 Trotanoy today, as these wines are fully mature and absolutely complete expressions of just what was qualitatively possible in their respective years.

It is really high time that the wine world at large grew out of its simplistic approach to Bordeaux quality as a reflection of ripeness and muscle, as these have never traditionally been the factors that defined greatness in the region- and they are not today either! Big, powerful wines such as 1947 Cheval Blanc or 1950 Pétrus must be seen as the anomalies that they are- not as paradigms for what all modern-day claret should emulate. There are far more brilliant wines of elegance, complexity and intensity of flavor to be found in the last sixty or seventy years of Bordeaux vintages than there are top wines of sheer power- at least up until the twenty-first century’s vintages. Even the great decade of the 1980s in Bordeaux only really produced two top flight vintages of powerfully ripe wines (1982 and 1989), with the jury still decidedly out on the 1986 Left Bank wines (it was never a great year on the Right Bank and the stubbornly tough Left Bank ‘86s may never really blossom sufficiently to deserve all that early praise) and the 1990 vintage having produced quite roasted wines that have generally matured at a brisk pace, lost quite a bit of breed and complexity along the way to their premature apogees, and now can be seen as one of the minor vintages of the decade and having been seriously overrated out of the blocks. In short, ripeness and muscle are only one type of a great vintage in Bordeaux, and it is far from self-evident that these types of years are really the best kind of vintages in the first place. I for one, would rank the supremely elegant 1961s or 1953s as my paradigms for Bordeaux greatness, and given this preference on my part, I find at least as much to love in a vintage like 1985 as I do in a vintage like 1982. Add into this equation the undisputed reality that there are a myriad of technologies and products available to winemakers today to manipulate a wine’s power, and it becomes pretty clear that if one is interested in authentic greatness in wine, perhaps one should look a bit further afield than at a wine’s musculature.

Which eventually gets us back to discussing in a bit more depth the misperception of Trotanoy having a bit of a slump in the vintages of the late 1970s and 1980s. One has to look a bit more carefully at the vintages in question- commonly cited as from 1976 to 1989 (with the aforementioned exception of the 1982)- and the charges leveled at these allegedly “sub-par” vintages of Trotanoy. I have not had the 1976 or 1977 Trots, so I cannot comment on them, but I do note that neither vintage is considered particularly high quality throughout Bordeaux. Despite its feeble reputation in some circles, the ’78 vintage of Trotanoy is actually excellent, with cooler black fruity tones and lots of gravelly soil and cigar smokiness in its profile, due to the very late-arriving ripeness of the “miracle vintage” of 1978 (that did not see the sugars in the grapes get to respectable levels without a brilliant Indian Summer at the end of the growing season- by today’s more robust standards, 1978 is decidedly underripe). 1979 in general, is a perfectly acceptable, lighter vintage of modestly-ripe, middleweights as well in Bordeaux, but the 1979 Trotanoy is an utterly complete wine of exquisite complexity and one of the best wines of the vintage to be found in Bordeaux. Similar things can be said about the 1981- which was probably best in

Pomerol in any case- and the quality of the '81 Trotanoy totally transcends the vintage and today, is one of the great sleepers out there for superb Pomerol at its apogee of peak drinkability. I simply do not see how charges of a "slump" can be laid at the doorstep of Trotanoy in these vintages- they are not great Bordeaux years and yet they are truly exquisite Trotanoys- particularly when viewed within the context of the general vintage characteristics of Pomerol and Bordeaux generally.

The perfect example of this non-slump at Trotanoy is the gloriously understated and seamless 1985. It is a young wine that is unequivocally still on its way up and has not yet fully emerged from its adolescence; my gut instinct is that this will be a magical and highly-revered vintage of Trotanoy ten to twenty years from now. However, one has to have followed the 1985 vintage a bit over the last decade and a half to really understand where the 1985 Trotanoy is today in its evolutionary arc. The vintage in general showed plenty of perfume and silky complexity soon after it was released in bottle, but its underlying depth and structural integrity were far from overt in the first decade or so after bottling. But, so many of the 1985s started to put on weight and show dramatically more serious structure and depth from about the year 2000 forward, and today a great many of the top 1985s would rank at the very top of my list of the best clarets of the decade of the 1980s. Look at a wine like 1985 Lafite-Rothschild for instance, which is "Exhibit A" for how this vintage has grown with bottle age (the '85 is clearly now superior to any other Lafite from this decade)! Given that Trotanoy is historically one of the slowest wines to unfold in Pomerol, is it surprising that there still remains a bit of the laid back, easy-going structural elements in the '85 Trotanoy today? Back in 1995 or 2000, almost all of the top 1985s showed this characteristic to varying degrees, and it is only since that time that these wines have started to deepen, blossom and really show their true constituent components. I would be shocked if the 1985 Trotanoy does not do the same in the next half dozen years, as the wine currently shows off superb intensity of flavor, marvelous complexity on both the nose and palate, and plenty of lurking structure behind its currently seamless character. It is very much reflective structurally today of the place where a wine like the 1985 Lafite was around the turn of the century. Given the fact that a vintage like 1970 Trotanoy has still not fully reached its apogee at age forty-three, is it perhaps not a bit too soon to be writing off the 1985 Trotanoy- given the fact that it is presently in the very same stage of evolutionary development that so many of the quicker to unfold 1985 clarets were a dozen years ago?

And perhaps the most enlightening approach to the question of whether or not there was a slump for a period at Trotanoy (everyone seems to be in agreement that there have been no issues at all with quality here since 1990 and today Trotanoy is consistently of First Growth quality each and every year) is to look a bit more closely also at the vintages of the so-called golden era here from 1975 backwards. I have been very fortunate to taste many of the top vintages of this era on multiple occasions over the years and feel myself quite blessed to have this base of (highly pleasurable) experience at my disposal. Of the top vintages from this epoch, the brilliant 1975 is really not a particularly powerful vintage, as it is far more svelte, tightly-knit and elegant than the broader-shouldered 1982 for instance (not to mention the much larger-scaled wines produced here in recent drought vintages like 2009, 2010 and 2011). In many ways, it is the quintessential vintage of Trotanoy, with great intensity of flavor, brilliant soil signature, stunning purity and depth of fruit and no shortage of structure that has taken nearly four decades to really start to blossom completely. The wine remains still young (and likely to improve!), and

while it is far from a delicate wine, it is as much about seamless elegance and intensity as it is about concentration and power. The 1971 was always more easy-going structurally than the 1975 (or the 1970 for that matter), and drank far sooner in its evolution, but it too remains true to its vintage character and is a great wine of refined and velvety elegance, rather than a powerful wine. The 1970 is a big-boned wine (particularly in the context of the vintage's general style), which never showed the same velvety and perfumed brilliance as wines such as '70 Pétrus or '70 La Conseillante, and in fact has more in common in this vintage with the sturdy and still not ready 1970 Château Lafleur. The '70 Trotanoy is a very, very good wine, but, to my mind, it suffers in comparison to a wine such as 1975 for the very reason that it is bigger, more muscular and inherently not as elegant as the '75.



The very understated "château" at Trotanoy- quite emblematic of old school Pomerol.

Looking a bit further back, the 1966 is quintessentially elegant (and a brilliant Trotanoy that again has been sadly underrated by the claret pundits of the past), as are the 1962 and the otherworldly 1961 vintages of this great estate. The 1964 Trotanoy conversely, is cut from the more muscular side of the ledger, and while it is now fully mature and has softened nicely (the first few bottles of the '64 I tasted fifteen years ago were downright stern in terms of structure and even at their age at the time, quite monolithic and still not ready to drink!), it is still a bit more rustic in personality than my favorite vintages of this property. It is a superb wine by any stretch of the imagination, but it is not quite the equal of the 1961 and certainly not superior to the wonderfully refined and elegant (and quite stylistically different) 1962 and 1966. Certainly, when one stretches back to the decade of the 1950s, the two vintages that I have tasted (1959 and 1952) are bigger-scaled and more muscular styles of Trotanoy, but this can be said for every

wine of Pomerol in this era (with the possible exception of Vieux Château Certan) in the 1950s, and I am not really sure that these bigger-boned Pomerols of this era (which I love and am always thrilled to drink when one crosses my path these days) are inherently superior to the more overtly refined wines of vintages such as '62, '66 or '71. In short, it seems pretty clear that there is little evidence that bigger and more muscularly-styled vintages of Trotanoy from its so-called “glory days” are in fact superior to the more elegantly-styled, exceptional vintages from this same era, and there is no reason not to champion the more elegant expressions of Trotanoy’s great *terroir*, such as the lovely 1985, as equally valid and compelling examples of Trotanoy greatness. This is an estate that has a very rich and varied history of magically complex wines, and this historical mosaic of high-quality stylistic variation certainly deserves spending more than a few minutes superficially pondering its character and simplistically latching onto rather unsophisticated platitudes about the bigger and riper vintages being the best.

While much of the discussion of Château Trotanoy has thus far focused on older vintages, it should be noted that this estate remains (up to the present time) one of the true champions of old school, unmanipulated claret. The wines are fermented in temperature-controlled cement vats, and aged in a range from thirty to fifty percent new oak (depending on the style of a given vintage), with the team at Trotanoy having no use for micro-oxygenation, extremely late harvesting or other parlor tricks in the cellar to try and exaggerate the wines’ early appeal for those easily swayed by superficial appearances in young wines. It continues to be made in its traditionally-structured style and is fashioned to be one of Pomerol’s longest-lived and most rewarding wines in the cellar. In top vintages, twenty years is really not sufficient for the wine to truly start to blossom with total commitment, and in reality, thirty years of age is the point of departure where the great inherent structure of Trotanoy starts to peel back and the velvety and perfumed side of this wine comes into ascendancy. Having never drunk Trotanoy back beyond the 1952 vintage, I do not really have a sense of just how long great vintages of this wine will last and drink with great style, but I have to imagine that sixty to eighty years of potential longevity is far from out of the question.

In short- though it pains me to write this (as such statements are usually seen as justification for raising prices, and the Moueix family has already been marching those at Trotanoy higher in the last handful of vintages)- Château Trotanoy has been a First Growth in all but name for the last half century at least, and probably for as long as they have been making wines from this section of the Pomerol plateau. I have no experience with wines back beyond the 1952 Trotanoy, but one has to suppose that there was a very good reason why Château Trotanoy and Vieux Château Certan were the most respected and cherished wines produced in Pomerol for so many decades back in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One has to remember that this was an age that gave us Monet, Renoir, van Gogh, electric light bulbs, the phonograph, the automobile, the standardization of *Methode Champenoise* techniques and the *Belle Époque*, so not everything worth having has been invented by Apple in the last decade! So, there is no reason to assume that the very high reputation of Trotanoy back in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth was not very much deserved and reflective of great wines being consistently produced here for a very long time.

In any case, it is my distinct impression that Château Trotanoy is one of the greatest estates in all of Bordeaux today- and has been so since at least the end of the Second World War.

In the commune of Pomerol, only estates such as Château Pétrus, Château Lafleur and Vieux Château Certan have consistently been able to attain the same magnificence in their wines over the same period of time, and Trotanoy must surely be seen as one of Bordeaux's First Growths from this period forward. The wines today are every bit as stunning as they have been throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, and they remain iconic wines of traditional structure and slowly unfolding magnificence. Given the unique *terroir* of Trotanoy- which, like the vineyard of Musigny in Burgundy, is inherently home to very long-lived wines whose mysteries only time can fully unlock- it is unclear (even if the Moueix family were ever tempted to try some of the modern techniques that make young Bordeaux more fleshy and easy to enjoy right out of the blocks, which thankfully, they are not) that the *terroir* here would cooperate with attempts to spoofulate the wines at Trotanoy. Certainly I would never expect this to happen in any case, as the Moueix family remains one of the staunchest defenders of traditionally-styled Bordeaux in any case. I have a gut feeling that these profound soils of black clay, gravel and iron will always tightly-wrap young vintages of Trotanoy in their structural elements and demand that tasters of young vintages here bring a bit more to the table in terms of imagination and experience if they hope to divine the true potential of these young wines. Fans of authentic, traditional wines can only hope that Château Trotanoy will continue as a beacon of long-lived, old school claret on into the uncertain Bordeaux future. For many years, one has had the sense that the Moueix family fully cherished its role as guardians of classic claret, and that Trotanoy would be totally out of reach of the purveyors of stylistic short-sightedness that hover over the Gironde, but with the arrival of Michel Rolland at Figeac this year, one can no longer be quite so confident about expectations of the future of Bordeaux bastions of tradition.

This report on Château Trotanoy has been in the works for several years- I think I approached Christian Moueix about visiting the property and filling in a couple of the holes in my tasting notes of more recent vintages that I had not tasted of Trotanoy more than four years ago- but, our schedules never synched up on my trips to Bordeaux and it would still be a work in progress if it had not been for David Hamburger of The Wine Workshop here in New York, who put together a superb vertical tasting of the estate's wines and invited me to attend at the end of September of this year. It was a most comprehensive and exhilarating tasting, with most of the top vintages of the last forty years included, as well as several of the less well-known, but excellent vintages from Trotanoy's recent past. I already had recent notes on several of the most famous vintages of Trotanoy from the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, as this is one of my absolute favorite properties on either side of the Gironde and I always go out of my way to taste Trotanoy when humanly possible, but my cellar is not as deep in the wines from this estate as I would like it to be and The Wine Workshop tasting was a golden opportunity to cover some vintages that I had not seen before and did not have in the cellar. My sincere thanks go out to David for thinking of inviting me for this superb celebration of the magic of Trotanoy. The notes on the 2012, 2011 and 2009 vintages of Trotanoy are from my En Primeur visits here in recent years and are barrel samples that were tasted in the Moueix offices in Libourne. The 2010 and all subsequent vintages have been tasted here in New York over the last year or two, with one or two notable exceptions (such as the 1952) that were tasted previously and are included here for sake of completeness.

2012 Château Trotanoy (barrel sample note)

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

2011 Château Trotanoy (barrel sample note)

The 2011 Trotanoy is one of the wines of the vintage and an absolute classic in the making. The deep, pure and utterly brilliant nose soars from the glass in a blaze of red and black plums, black cherries, woodsmoke, coffee, chocolate, complex soil tones, fresh herbs and a seamless base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly suave on the attack, with great intensity of flavor, a rock solid core of pure fruit, ripe, beautifully-integrated tannins and laser-like focus on the very, very long, poised and stunning finish. Perhaps this will turn out along the lines of the legendary 1975 Trotanoy? 2025-2075+. **96.**

2010 Espérance de Trotanoy

The 2010 Espérance de Trotanoy is plenty ripe, as it tips the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol, but, like the *grand vin*, it avoids any signs of *sur maturité* in its aromatic and flavor profile. The bouquet is a ripe blend of black plums, black cherries, chocolate, dark soil tones, just a touch of Cuban tobacco and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is big, full-bodied and primary, with nice plushness on the attack, a fine core, but some overt heat and a fair bit of dry-edged, quite substantial tannins disturbing the harmony on the long finish. Like a great many 2010s, there is noticeable acidity on the backend, but the acids are not ripe and are rather coarse, adding to a real sense of disequilibrium at the present time on the backend of this wine. When one tastes the 2010 Espérance de Trotanoy, one understands why the *grand vin* is so successful (in relative terms, as this is emphatically not a great vintage on either bank of the Gironde!), as the inferior elements seem to have all found their way into the second wine. This is okay, as it does have a bit of Trotanoy character to it, but I am far from sanguine about the overall balance of this wine for extended aging, and it is far too chewy today to drink the wine on the young side. 2020-2035? **82-87?**

2010 Château Trotanoy

I had been very impressed with 2010 Château Trotanoy out of barrel, as I found this to be one of the very finest examples of the vintage. Out of bottle, the wine seems to be delivering on its early promise, and though it will always be a big-boned and very ripe example of Trotanoy (tipping the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol), there is a lot more to like here than in most examples of this vintage! The nose is very ripe, but does not show any signs of *sur maturité* in its sappy bouquet of black cherries, plums, chocolate, cigar ash, violets, lovely soil tones and toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and opulent on the attack, with a rock solid core, with firm, very substantial tannins, tangy (but, reasonably ripe) acids and a very, very long, complex and youthful finish. The wine is starting to show just a touch of backend heaviness from the vintage, and it seems that I overrated this a touch from barrel. But, although this will never be my favorite recent vintage of Trotanoy (give me the powerful, but much more classic 2009 or the utterly refined and majestic 2008!), but it is a stellar success for the vintage. 2025-2060+? **93+.**

2009 Château Trotanoy (barrel sample note)

The 2009 Trotanoy is flat out magnificent and clearly one of the top handful of wines made in Bordeaux in this vintage. Of all the Pomerols that I tasted on this trip, only Pétrus is superior to Trotanoy, as this wine is simply a great classic in the making. The utterly profound and regal nose offers up a glorious mélange of plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, herb tones, woodsmoke, a stunningly complex base of soil, coffee bean, a hint of the blood orange to come and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and flawlessly balanced, with a huge core of pure fruit, stunning focus and balance, plenty of ripe tannins and an endless, utterly seamless finish. The 2009 Trotanoy is a very powerful vintage for this wine, but is so breathtakingly poised and light on its feet as to almost belie its amazing depth and intensity. One of the greatest young vintages of Trotanoy I have ever tasted, this is a masterpiece of traditional Pomerol in the making. Amazingly, this is the ripest wine in the entire Moueix stable this year, as it weighs in at a full 14.3 percent alcohol, and yet is utterly cool in the mouth. A profoundly great wine. 2022-2075+. **96-97.**

2008 Château Trotanoy

The 2008 Trotanoy is certainly one of the riper examples of the vintage that I have come across, as it reached a full fourteen percent in alcohol in this year, but the long, slow growing season has allowed the sugars to mount slowly and the precision of the *terroir* in this wine has remained truly remarkable. In several respects, I prefer the cooler and refined profile of the 2008 Trotanoy to the bigger and more powerful iterations of this great estate in 2009 and 2010. The bouquet on the wine is deep, very pure and impressively discreet, as it offers up scents of red plums, black cherries, Cuban cigars, coffee, beautiful minerality, herb tones and a fine base of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full, pure and chiseled, with a fine core, superb focus, ripe, moderate tannins, good acids and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and very intensely flavored finish. A beautiful and utterly classic vintage of Trotanoy that reminds me a bit of the 1975 in terms of precision and purity. It will be very interesting to see how this ranks in comparison to the more powerful wines of 2009 and 2010 at this estate when time has had its say, thirty or forty years down the road. 2020-2075. **95+.**

2007 Château Trotanoy

The 2007 Trotanoy is a beautiful middleweight in the making, with a sense of completeness on both the nose and palate that is immensely enjoyable. Despite the difficult summer of 2007, most merlot on the Right Bank eventually attained full ripeness by the time of the harvest in this vintage, and this is quite evident in the cool and classy profile of the '07 Trotanoy. The bouquet is deep, pure and utterly classic, offering up a complex mélange of plums, a bit of dark berry, coffee, fresh herbs, a really striking base of soil, a whiff of cigar smoke and a deft and well-measured base of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and beautifully balanced, with very good, but not great depth at the core, moderate tannins and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and very poised finish. The '07 Trotanoy is not as powerfully built as is customary with this great estate, but there are no holes anywhere to be found on the palate of this absolutely complete and classy wine- not to mention a great value for Trot! 2017-2045. **90.**

2005 Château Trotanoy

Ironically, as Trotanoy is one of my personal favorites in all of Bordeaux, I had never had the opportunity to cross paths with the 2005 Château Trotanoy prior to the Wine Workshop tasting. This is destined to be a great vintage of Trot, which I have little doubt will end up superior to the more muscular 2010 that seems to have caught the imagination of so many

commentators. The combination of ripeness and outstanding acidity that is found in the very best 2005s is very rare, and these qualities are certainly on display in this very young and potentially profound Trotanoy. The very young bouquet offers up a primary blend of black plums, black cherries, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, a touch of the gamebird to come, a lovely base of soil, incipient notes of nutskin and a lovely base of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, young and rock solid at the core, with stunning focus and balance, ripe tannins, lovely, tangy acids and superb length and grip on the glorious finish. This will be a legendary Trotanoy, but it is going to take a long time to climb to cruising altitude. It should be almost timeless. 2030-2100. **96.**

2001 Château Trotanoy

I am a very big fan of the 2001 vintage in Bordeaux in general, but for whatever reason, the 2001 Trotanoy- which I had never had before- was not singing at our tasting here in New York in September. The nose seems borderline overripe in its mélange of black plums and black cherries, dark chocolate, nutskins, violets, soil and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and seems a touch pumped up, with moderate tannins, still very primary fruit tones at the core, and good, but not great length and grip on the well-balanced, but not particularly complex finish. I was really expecting a bit more from this great *terroir* in this vastly underrated vintage. Was our bottle representative? 2017-2035? **87+?**

2000 Château Trotanoy

I have had some rather sulking, desultory showings of big name 2000 claret in the last couple of years (a very grumpy bottle of Cheval Blanc immediately comes to mind), and this is a vintage that seems likely to be eventually consigned to the “vastly overrated” camp in the decades to come. That said, the 2000 Trotanoy showed brilliant potential at our tasting and is a wine that fully embodied the hope engendered by all of the early hype surrounding the vintage. The deep, classic and still youthful nose wafts from the glass in superb blend of cherries, red plums, nutskins, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, menthol and a lovely base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and tightly-knit, with a lovely core, outstanding focus and balance, ripe, very well-integrated tannins and simply stunning length and grip on the primary and oh, so promising finish. This will be another legendary vintage of Trotanoy in the fullness of time. 2025-2075+. **95.**

1999 Château Trotanoy

Like the 2001, the 1999 Château Trotanoy is a bit of a disappointment- particularly by the very high standards of this property. The wine again seems a bit manipulated on the nose, with a rather straightforward bouquet of black plums, a touch of shoe polish, dark soil tones and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rather monolithic in profile, with a good core, moderate tannins and pretty good length and grip on the chunky finish. This is the kind of wine that at other addresses would make me think that the concentrators were broken out to add a bit more *gras* to the vintage- but, could this have happened at Trotanoy? A strange, and not particularly hopeful showing for a wine from this estate- though it is perfectly serviceable in its simple way. 2015-2025+? **87+?**

1998 Château Trotanoy

I have heard glorious reports about the 1998 Trotanoy for many years, but this is another vintage I had never crossed paths with prior to our tasting. This is a great, great vintage for this superb estate, as the wine offers up a pure, youthful and utterly classic bouquet of black plums, black cherries, bitter chocolate, cigar wrapper, a touch of new leather, incipient notes of nutskin, gravelly soil tones, menthol and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied,

nascently complex and packed with pure fruit at the core, with superb soil signature, outstanding focus and grip, suave tannins and magical balance on the very long and primary finish. This is a stupendous young vintage of Trotanoy! 2023-2075. **96.**

1995 Château Trotanoy

It had been so many years since I last crossed paths with a bottle of 1995 Trotanoy that I was thrilled to see this vintage in our lineup. This is another absolutely classic vintage of this great estate, and my gut feeling that the 1995 is the second coming of the legendary 1975 Trotanoy and all this great wine needs is more time in the cellar to reach fruition. The stunningly pure and focused nose offers up a superb blend of black plums, cherries, dark chocolate, Cuban tobacco, incipient notes of black truffle, dark soil tones, nutskin and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate, the wine is full-bodied, poised and now quite plush on the attack, with a rock solid core, ripe tannins, laser-like focus and exceptional grip on the perfectly balanced and very, very long finish. This is a great Trotanoy in the making. 2025-2075+. **95+.**

1994 Château Trotanoy

It has been a few years since I last saw a bottle of the 1994 Trotanoy, and when last tasted, it was still a bit bound up in its structure and not showing quite as well as I had anticipated (as I have had some very good Pomerols from this vintage). The nose offers up a solid blend of plums, red berries, olives, cocoa, soil tones and a bit of new wood that was still not fully integrated into the body of the wine at age twelve. On the palate the wine is medium-full and complex, but dips just a touch in the mid-palate, with moderate tannins, good focus and respectable length and grip on the finish. It would be very interesting to revisit this wine today, as it may well have blossomed, but back in 2006 it was not particularly forthcoming and really seemed just a tad scrawny at the core. 2006-2025? **84-87+?**

1990 Château Trotanoy

Château Trotanoy has produced a good, solid example of this roasted vintage, and the wine is now quite mature and is drinking very well indeed. The warm weather nose offers up scents of roasted black plums, a bit of grilled meat, espresso, cigar smoke, slightly medicinal overtones and a nice base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and rather roasted in style, with a solid core, melting tannins, and good focus and grip on the long, wide open finish. This will not make old bones and will be a relatively short-lived vintage by Trotanoy's nearly timeless standards, but it is a good drink and one of the better 1990s out there for current consumption. 2013-2030+. **91.**

1989 Château Trotanoy

It had been many, many years since I last tasted the 1989 Château Trotanoy, and the wine has evolved beautifully from those youthful days and the last two bottles that I have tasted have been really quite lovely. The bouquet is deep, complex and just beginning to blossom at age twenty-four, as it offers up a lovely blend of red plums, a touch of blood orange, tobacco smoke, incipient notes of Pomerol nuttiness, mocha, and a stylish base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and still fairly primary, with a velvety core of fruit, lovely focus, a fair bit of ripe tannin still to resolve, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. I would still give this vintage of Trotanoy at least another five or six years in the cellar to really open up (though it is certainly quite approachable already), and in reality, this wine is going to be decidedly better to drink ten or twelve years further down the road. A lovely vintage of Trotanoy that still deserves a bit of extended cellaring- it is not quite as big and plush as some '89 Pomerols, but it is a superb wine that is still climbing in quality. 2016-2060. **93+.**

1988 Château Trotanoy

The 1988 Château Trotanoy is a really lovely example of the vintage, with decidedly “cooler” fruit tones that are on the black fruity side of the ledger, as well as the notes of fresh herbs and gravel of less ripe vintages at this estate. The super bouquet is a blend of dark berries, black cherries, cigar ash, gravel, coffee, tobacco leaf, fresh herbs and a deft framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit on the young side, with a superb core of fruit, moderate tannins, good acids and excellent focus and complexity on the long and black fruity finish. Not a classic vintage of Trotanoy, but a classic example of Trotanoy from a cooler year. 2016-2040. **92+**.

1986 Château Trotanoy

1986 is not a particularly strong vintage for Pomerol, but the '86 Trotanoy has really turned out quite well indeed. The wine is again a bit more black fruity than many vintages of Trot, wafting from the glass in a complex mélange of dark plums, black cherries, sweet Cuban tobacco, a lovely base of soil, dark chocolate, woodsmoke and a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very refined, with a slight dip in the mid-palate, but excellent focus and grip, very modest tannins and a fine, persistent finish. Certainly, a great vintage of Trotanoy would have more mid-palate stuffing than the 1986, but this is a characteristic that is not singular to Trotanoy in this vintage, but rather reflective of the rather middling quality of the '86 vintage in Pomerol in general. I would be delighted to drink the '86 Trotanoy on any occasion, as it is an eminently satisfying glass of nearly mature Pomerol. 2013-2030. **90**.

1985 Château Trotanoy

This is a very young and still quite primary example of the 1985 vintage, and I have little doubt that, given sufficient bottle age, this will eventually be one of the wines of the vintage, as it shows outstanding intensity of flavor, an utterly seamless personality and extraordinary balance and precision. The youthful bouquet offers up a lovely blend of red and black plums, a touch of nutskin, mocha, cigar smoke, a beautifully complex base of gravelly soil, coffee, fresh herbs and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and very pure, with a fine core, excellent intensity and nascent complexity, moderate, perfectly-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the suave, understated and dancing finish. The worst-case scenario for the 1985 Trotanoy is that it evolves into a beautifully perfumed and complex middleweight, but my gut instincts is that (like so many other '85s a few years ago) there is more depth and structure here than currently meets the eye and that this wine is likely to put on weight over the course of the next decade and blossom into a reference point vintage of Trotanoy. Time will tell. If it does so, my score will seem conservative! 2020-2060. **94+**.

1983 Château Trotanoy

The 1983 Trotanoy is a beautiful example of the vintage and one of the great unsung years for this estate in the superb decade of the 1980s. The excellent bouquet offers up a very complex and classic mélange of dark berries, roasted plums, cigar smoke, a touch of new leather, tobacco leaf, incipient nuttiness, coffee, a beautiful base of gravelly soil, fresh herbs, incipient notes of black truffles and a smoke topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with a fine core of fruit, superb elegance and focus, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the perfectly balanced, creamy and light on its feet finish. A beautiful bottle of Trotanoy, the 1983 is now just arriving its apogee of peak drinkability and should cruise along at this fine level for another two or three decades- and may be even more enjoyable with another five or six years of the tannins melting further into the background. 2013-2035+. **92+**.

1982 Château Trotanoy

I have had a bit of bad luck with the '82 Trotanoy in the last few years, as my last bottle in the cellar I opened up in June of this year (for my father's 82nd birthday) and it was corked. The first bottle at our Wine Workshop tasting was also not really spot on (showing rather muted and probably slightly corked), but David stepped in and opened up his backup bottle of the '82 and we were blessed with a perfect rendition of this great wine on the second go-round! The 1982 Trotanoy is still a few years away from its prime, but is already a pretty profound bottle of wine. This is a big-boned vintage for this wine, and while it is a beautifully made example, it is probably not my personal favorite style of Trotanoy and there are other, more suave vintages (such as 1975) that I have even more affection for than the 1982. That said, this is still a dynamite wine, offering up a multi-dimensional nose baked plums and mulberries, mocha, plenty of game tones, grilled nuts, almost a touch of petrol, a lovely base of soil, cigar smoke and a nice framing of vanillin oak. On the palate this is a very broad-shouldered Trot, with a full and opulent attack, a huge, billowing core of fruit, great underlying structure, and a long, powerful, ripely-tannic finish. This is a bigger-boned wine than the superbly elegant and tightly-knit 1975, with more meatiness and blacker fruit, but I have a hard time picking a favorite between these two brilliant wines. While the 1982 is a great drink today, this wine is still nowhere near its peak of maturity. I would try to give it at least another five to ten years in the cellar, and then consume it with close friends over the next four decades. It is a monumentally-scaled and slightly roasted style of Trotanoy. 2013-2050. **96.**



Christian Moueix in his offices in Libourne- the Moueix family has safeguarded Trotanoy since '53.

1981 Château Trotanoy

The 1981 Château Trotanoy has to be one of the top wines of the vintage! The deep, complex and beautifully resolved nose wafts from the glass in a perfumed blend of red plums, mulberries, cigar smoke, mocha, fresh herb tones, gravelly soils, a touch of gamebird and still a nice touch of tobacco leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open on the attack, with a good core of fruit, fine structure and focus, just a wisp of remaining tannin and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. I served this wine double blind to some friends who are very serious Bordeaux fans and they never once thought this wine might hail from a so-called “off vintage”! It is a stunning wine from a vintage that was probably stronger in Pomerol than anywhere else in Bordeaux (wines like ’81 Certande-May, La Conseillante and Pétrus were superb in their day), but the ’81 Trotanoy seems to have stood the test of time better than any of these wines and has plenty of superb drinking still ahead of it. This is one of the great sleeper vintages of Trotanoy out there today. 2013-2030. **93+.**

1979 Château Trotanoy

The 1979 Château Trotanoy is really a lovely example of this vintage, without the power and length of a very top vintage of this great estate, but with all the complexity and breed that one rightly expects year in and year out from this magical Pomerol property. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a mix of red plums, cherries, mocha, gamebirds, woodsmoke, Cuban cigars, gravelly soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and quite full-bodied for the vintage, with a solid core of fruit, lovely focus and detail, melting tannins and an ever so slightly angular aspect on the finish. This is not as long or refined as a great vintage of Trotanoy, but it lacks nothing in terms of complexity on the attack or grip and purity on the finish, and really is an utterly satisfying vintage of Trot for current consumption. 2013-2025+. **92.**

1978 Château Trotanoy

The 1978 Château Trotanoy starts out slowly in the decanter, but with about an hour’s air the wine blossoms into a brilliantly complex and classic example of this fine estate. The bouquet is deep, pure and utterly captivating as it soars from the glass in a complex mélange of black plums, cherries, coffee, a beautifully complex base of soil, a touch of black olive and cigar smoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly seamless, with a sappy core of fruit, seamless balance, melting tannins and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly poised finish. The ’78 Trotanoy does not have the overt power of a vintage such as 1982, but it is no shrinking violet and a superb and classically proportioned Pomerol at its apogee of maturity. It is one of the top wines that I have tasted from the vintage. 2013-2030+. **93.**

1975 Château Trotanoy

I am a very firm believer that the 1975 vintage in Pomerol is superior to 1982, and one of my prime examples I would cite as evidence would be this great vintage. The 1975 vintage of Trotanoy has long been one of my absolute favorites from this legendary estate, and age thirty-eight the wine is just now beginning to reach its apogee and really drink at its regal best. The celestial bouquet offers up a beautiful mélange of mulberries, pure cherries, summer truffles, a touch of nutskins, cigar smoke, coffee, wonderfully complex soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and utterly seamless, with superb mid-palate depth, extraordinary focus and balance, melting tannins, tangy acids and profound length and grip on the laser-like finish. The 1975 Trotanoy really stands out for its profound synthesis of intensity and elegance, and while this is inherently a powerful wine, its absolute

refinement on the palate is the element that makes it one of my all-time favorite vintages of Trotanoy. I have been lucky enough to taste with quite some regularity over the years, as I once owned a case of this great wine and took great pleasure in each and every bottle out of the dozen that I shared with family and friends. At the Wine Workshop tasting, the brilliance of the 1975 made me wish I was only beginning to start to drink my dozen bottles, rather than having finished the last one up a couple of years ago! 2013-2050. **97.**

1974 Château Trotanoy

I cannot ever recall tasting a bottle of 1974 claret, let alone one that is absolutely delicious and still alive and kicking. This was given to me by a friend who insisted that I taste it blind (it arrive wrapped in foil), and I could not believe it was a '74 when I finally unveiled the bottle. The nose is deep, complex and really quite lovely, as it wafts from the glass in a fine blend of plums, dark berries, singed candle wax, tobacco, a touch of menthol and a lovely base of soil that reminds me of heather. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and really very complex, with good mid-palate depth, melting tannins and just a hint of rusticity on the long finish that indicates this does not come from a top-notch vintage. I would love to find more of this, as it is really drinking well today. 2007-2017. **88.**

1971 Château Trotanoy

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

1970 Château Trotanoy

I have had the good fortune to follow this wine now for more than twenty years, and it is finally starting to really drink well and emerge from behind what was a pretty substantial structure. The quite black fruity bouquet is now starting to finally blossom, as it offers up a mélange of black plums, dark berries, chocolate, nutskins, cigar ash, a bit of game, just a whisper of tariness and a fine base of gravelly soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite powerfully built for a 1970 Pomerol, with lovely complexity, a rock solid core, still a bit of tannin to resolve and great length and grip on the well-balanced and palate-staining finish. The 1970 Trotanoy is a wine that I have tasted with some regularity over the last couple of decades, and for many years I thought this very sturdy example of the vintage was never going to really come around, but over the last five years or so the wine has really started to blossom and show its true colors- which just goes to show how very long-lived great vintages can be from this estate! This is one of the more powerfully-styled vintages of Trotanoy in the decade of the 1970s. 2013-2050. **94+.**

1967 Château Trotanoy

I have not tasted the 1967 Trotanoy for nearly a decade, but the last time I tasted it the wine showed stunning structure for the vintage and no signs of slowing down any time soon. The bouquet on this wine is simply fabulous, soaring from the glass in a blaze of pomegranate, chocolate, singed tobacco, walnuts, herb tones, earth and a bit of truffle. This has a depth of sweet fruit and complexity that is found in wines such as the 1975 and the 1971! On the palate

the wine is shockingly full-bodied for the vintage (probably a tad bigger and more powerful than the 1971 Trot!), with a rock solid core of fruit, tremendous focus and grip, and majestic length and breed on the complex and perfectly balanced finish. I have had the good fortune to drink this wine on many occasions over the years (as I once owned a case- now sadly all consumed), and it is one of the great “sleeper vintages” of Trotanoy from the decade of the 1960s. The only other 1967 claret I have tasted at this level is Latour, though the '67 Pétrus also has a great reputation, but the only bottle of that wine I have ever crossed paths with was not in pristine shape, so I cannot compare it to the '67 Trotanoy. Though it has been more than a decade since I last drank a bottle of the 1967 Trotanoy, I have no doubt that well-stored bottles of this wine are still stunning and have years of life ahead of them. This is not just a great wine for the vintage, but a great vintage for this wine. 2001-2040. **94.**

1966 Château Trotanoy (bottled by Jacques Feys- Brussels)

This Belgian-bottled '66 was the first example I had tasted of Trotanoy from this vintage, and the wine was absolutely stellar. I have to give it a slight nod over the more powerful, but less elegant and complex '64 Trotanoy that I tasted last year. The bouquet is deep, refined and in full bloom, soaring from the glass in a mélange of plums, blood orange, mulberries, loads of black truffles, chocolate, cigar smoke, strong soil tones and a delicate topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a core of juicy fruit, excellent structure, and a long, velvety and impeccably balanced finish. There remains just a whiff of melted tannin here, but the wine's blood orange acidity continues to give the wine shape and grip on the finish. This is a great Trotanoy- can the château bottling be even better than this stellar example? 2004-2020+. **95.**

1964 Château Trotanoy

I had only had one previous opportunity to taste the 1964 Trotanoy (several years ago), and unfortunately that bottle was not pristine. However, this particular bottles was in perfect condition and validated the great reputation of this vintage of Trotanoy, as the wine soars from the glass in a blaze of red plums, black cherries, blood orange, bitter chocolate, a bit of toasted walnut, tobacco, earth, a hint of wood and a delicate topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and aristocratic, with a lovely stylistic synthesis between the modern suave Pomerols and the more powerful old-style that defined this region in the 1940s and 1950s. The wine still possesses a fair measure of tannin, but is perfectly balanced and hauntingly long on the finish. It is cut more from the stylistic cloth of the 1970 vintage here, rather than the more elegant and silky 1971 Trotanoy. A rather remarkable wine. 2004-2025. **95.**

1962 Château Trotanoy

Trotanoy in its glory days is a wine of First Growth dimension, and the 1962 is Trotanoy at the top of its game and clearly a candidate for wine of the vintage. The bouquet is deep, profound and brilliant, as it soars from the glass in a celestial mélange of red plums, nutskins, tobacco, blood oranges, woodsmoke, a touch of Asian Five Spice powder, and a simply great base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and displays an intensity and sense of depth that is very rare in this vintage, with a rock solid core of fruit, still a bit of tannin to carry it for many more years, and magnificent length and grip on the profound, peacock's tail of a finish. A brilliant, transcendental 1962 that would be very hard to detect in a tasting of the best wines of the 1961 vintage. 2007-2030+. **95.**

1961 Château Trotanoy

Prior to the Wine Workshop tasting, I had never been fortunate enough to cross paths with the 1961 Trotanoy, but one of the couples in attendance brought a bottle out of their cellar to “round out” our lineup! This is a magical vintage of Trotanoy that is at its absolute zenith and offers up a profound tasting experience. The celestial bouquet offers up a beautiful blend of mulberries, dark plums, chocolate, walnuts, cigar smoke, mocha, gravelly soil tones, summer truffles and a hint of red curry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with stunning mid-palate depth, magical complexity, a great sense of sweetness at the core, great soil inflection and a very, very long, velvety and nicely tangy finish. One cannot imagine a better balanced or more elegant rendition of the magical *terroir* of Trotanoy! A brilliant wine. 2013-2040. **98.**

1959 Château Trotanoy (Nicolas Bottling)

The 1959 Trotanoy is a terrific example of this outstanding vintage. The bouquet is deep, complex and delivers a beautiful aromatic blend of dark plums, nutty tones, woodsmoke, herbs, blood orange, a touch of candle wax, coffee, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones and a touch of singed tobacco in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and every bit as complex as the nose promises, with soft tannins, great mid-palate depth, beautiful focus and balance and excellent length and grip on the velvety and multi-dimensional finish. This is a beautiful vintage of Trotanoy, but I may have an ever so slight preference for the slightly more high acid vintages such as 1966 or 1962 over the riper and more powerful 1959. But we are talking about only a very small difference between all of these great old vintages of Trotanoy. 2009-2030. **94.**

1952 Château Trotanoy (last tasted in 1996)

Back in the 1990s, I did not have much experience with Pomerols from the 1950s (not for lack of trying), but everything I read at the time lead me to believe there was no shortage of great wines made in this decade on the Right Bank. Happily I have had a chance to broaden my experience with this extraordinary decade in Pomerol and St. Émilion in the ensuing years. In 1996, I had a chance to taste one of my first 1952 Pomerols, as the 1952 Trotanoy was generously served to me by a friend. Sadly, I have not seen this great wine again since '96, but include the note here as it was a stunning bottle of wine and probably is still drinking at a beautiful level. The '52 Trotanoy explodes from the glass with a spectacular, very thick, but resolved nose of black cherries, tobacco, black truffles, walnuts, earth, chocolate, and a touch of oak. Deep, full-bodied, and extremely powerful on the palate (this is after all still an old school Pomerol), with thick, old-style extract, superb focus, great complexity and substantial, chewy, but well-covered tannins on the very long finish. A great, great wine that should drink well for years and years to come. It is nowhere near as polished and refined as vintages from 1961 forwards from Château Trotanoy, but is a superb example of the previous style at this estate. Just imagine how happy the Moueix family would have been to purchase this property in 1953 and have this great wine resting in barrel in the cellars! 1996-2010+. **95.**

THE GREAT CLASSIC STYLE OF COMMENDATORE G. B. BURLOTTO BAROLI



The wonderful estate of Comm. G. B. Burlotto lies just a bit off the beaten track in the Barolo firmament, as it is found in one of the smallest of the eleven villages that make up the Barolo DOCG: Verduno. This village lies at the northernmost reaches of the Barolo DOCG, just south of the Tanaro River which runs through the city of Alba to the east, with Verduno lying due north of the township of La Morra. However, while Verduno is a small village with only a relatively modest number of bottlers these days (a very large percentage of the producers here belong to the cooperative and produce little or no wine under their own labels), it was once home to one of the seminal figures in the history of Barolo, the *Commendatore* Giovan Battista Burlotto. The *Commendatore* Burlotto settled here in the 1850s, and up until his death in 1927, he was the village's larger than life character and one of the most important producers and promoters of the wines of Barolo in the entire region. The *Commendatore* Burlotto was born in the late 1820s or early 1830s (early family records are virtually non-existent today, so some of these dates are necessarily estimates) and eventually became a merchant of the wines of the Barolo region, with his focus on purchasing grapes primarily from the Monvigliero vineyard in Verduno and in vineyards such as Cannubi in the village of Barolo. He founded his winemaking company around 1850, and a few years later, purchased an elegant country farmhouse and cellars in the village of Verduno which still houses the Burlotto winery to this day. He was eventually

able to purchase a significant percentage of the finest cru of the village (and one of the top in all of Barolo)- Monvigliero, in the sunniest section at the top of the hillside. Over time, he added to his vineyard holdings with additional vines in another cru in Verduno, Massara. There is also a seventeenth century, private chapel next to the elegant Burlotto farmhouse in Verduno, and the *Commendatore* purchased that as well over the years of his career in the village, and today it is used by the winery to hold important tastings.

These days, the village of Verduno is not one of the most famous of the townships that make up the Barolo DOCG (as the fifty-four hectares of vineyards here only comprise four percent of the total surface area under vine for producing Barolo), but back in the latter half of the nineteenth century, this was one of the epicenters of wine production in the Barolo region. It was in this village that the Savoy Royal family set up its summer residence for King Carlo Alberto and his family when it purchased the *Castello di Verduno* in the center of the town. The *Castello di Verduno* had been bought by the newly crowned King of Italy (remember, Italy was only unified as a single country in 1861), in the period of the late 1860s, after he fell in love with the region and its wines, having been previously given a great cache of Barolo wines by the Marchesa Giulia Falletti di Barolo (who was one of the true pioneers of the wines of the region). As readers may recall from the article on Giuseppe Mascarello a couple of years ago, it was Giulia Falletti's French oenologist, Louis Oudart, who first crafted Barolo as a dry wine at the behest of the Marchesa, who wished to have her wines made in a "Burgundian style" (previously the wines of the region had been semi-sweet), and it was the Marchesa Falletti who first began naming her wines "Barolo". The castle here in the center of Verduno had only been constructed around 1850 for the Marchese Luigi Caisotti, and less than twenty years later it was to become one of the favorite residences of the new king and his family, who loved the region for its wines and for the fine hunting in the surrounding countryside. In addition to setting up a summer residence, the King's family also set up their own wine production facility for the wines of Barolo in the castle of Verduno. Therefore, the choice of this village by the *Commendatore* Burlotto as his base of operations fifteen years earlier certainly turned out to be propitious. He would eventually become the principal purveyor of wines to the Savoy royal family.

By the mid-1860s, the *Commendatore* had also begun to range a bit further afield than the village of Verduno for parcels of vines to purchase, as he added a .7 hectare slice of the famous Cannubi vineyard in the village of Barolo to his vineyard holdings (as well as a small farmhouse, or *cascina*, in the heart of the vineyard). At the time, due in large part to the quality and fame of the wines of the Marchesa Falletti, the name of Barolo was just beginning to become well-known as the name for the primarily nebbiolo-based wine of the region and there was speculation that the use of the name might be restricted solely to wines that included a percentage of grapes from vineyards in the village proper of Barolo (so that production from villages such as Verduno, Monforte or Serralunga might be excluded from using the name "Barolo"). The Burlotto wines at this time were very typical of those of the few other producers in the region, as the *Commendatore* was purchasing grapes from farmers throughout the different villages to augment his production from his own vineyards in Verduno, but he did not want to be solely dependent on purchased grapes from producers in the village of Barolo for the right to use the name of "Barolo" for his wines, so the prudent course was to buy a parcel of vines in the village itself. Not surprisingly, given that the *Commendatore* Burlotto had quickly realized that the best vineyards produced the highest quality wines, he sought a plot of vines in Cannubi- the most

famous vineyard at the time in the entire region. In fact, the name of Cannubi was already well-known for quality before the Marchesa Falletti started to call her wines “Barolo”. However, despite owning this small slice of Cannubi, as well as purchasing grapes from several other farmers throughout the region, the *Commendatore*’s Baroli bottlings in the latter half of the nineteenth century always included a predominance of grapes from his home village of Verduno-reflecting the high reputation that the vineyards in the village had at the end of the nineteenth century.

Commendatore Burlotto was one the most important figures- if not the most important- in the early Barolo wine trade throughout the period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was a winemaker, merchant and great promoter of the wines of the region, being one of the very first producers who actually sold his wines in bottle, rather than in cask or *demijohn*. This was quite an innovation at the time, as other than the grand châteaux of Bordeaux, most of the world’s wines were sold in cask or other large vessels in this era, and certainly no one else in Piemonte was selling wines in bottle prior to the *Commendatore* Burlotto. The *Commendatore* Burlotto had a vision for the wines of Barolo that reached far beyond the beautiful rolling hillsides here in Piemonte, and he won his first gold medal at an international wine competition in 1881 in Milan, and followed this up with further gold medals at competitions in Turin and Paris throughout the remainder of the century. These wine competitions would become a focal point of the *Commendatore*’s marketing strategy for his wines, and all told, he would win thirty-two gold medals over the course of his career- a fact he began to proudly proclaim on his labels. He also was a firm believer in getting his wines into the “right hands” and he became the wine purveyor to the King and the Italian royal court in Turin during the course of his career. At the turn of the century, when the Duke of Abruzzi organized a famous expedition to the North Pole, the wines he brought with him were Burlotto Baroli! In 1910, the *Commendatore* finally had the opportunity to purchase the castle in Verduno (his own *château* on the Bordeaux model?) from the Savoy family, which came along with its own historic cellars, but he continued to the end of his career to use the cellars at the first estate he purchased in the 1860s, and the original house and cellars remain the location of the modern-day winery of G. B. Burlotto. King Carlo Alberto’s estate included the entirety of the cru vineyard of Massara in Verduno, and when the *Castello di Verduno* was sold by the Savoy family to the *Commendatore* Burlotto in 1910, the sale included all of Massara and this cru also became part of the Burlotto vineyard patrimony.

The *Commendatore* Burlotto produced three different bottlings during his career- a varietal bottling from the Pelaverga grape that was quite popular at the time (and has had a renaissance at the Burlotto winery and at the nearby *Castello di Verduno* in the last couple of decades- it even earned its own DOCG in 1995), his blended, flagship Barolo and a wine he called “Barolino” which was made from Dolcetto grapes that were fermented on top of the Nebbiolo skins after the Nebbiolo had been racked off of them and placed in large *Botti* for aging. The Burlotto “Barolino” was also a hit with customers and won its own gold medal at a wine competition in 1894. As today’s head of the Burlotto winery, Fabio Alessandria comments about the *Commendatore*, he “became an important producer thanks to the quality of his Baroli, (as evidenced by the numerous awards he won at the time), but the Barolino was a wine very popular in terms of price and the easily accessible style of wine.” Beyond the needs of the Italian royal family, one of the primary markets early on for the *Commendatore* Burlotto was in the

metropolis of Turin, where he would frequently visit and promote his wines for the restaurants and wealthy of the city. As this was still the day of horse-drawn wagons for most transportation in Piemonte, the *Commendatore* would often send his wines in casks for delivery by wagon to his top restaurant and private clients in Turin, but send the empty bottles by train to the city, and his cellar team would arrive with the casks and bottle the wines on premise for their customers from the casks that they had brought down from Verduno. In those days, the restaurateurs in Turin would have their own casks and demijohns in their cellars as well, so the Burlotto team would also fill casks, demijohns and bottles for their clients of the newly-released vintages of Barolo and Barolino. And, of course, the *Commendatore* Burlotto would be there to greet his clients and collect payments, having arrived with the bottles by train in Turin from Bra the night before.

For the Burlotto Barolo bottling at this time, the *Commendatore* combined the production from his own vineyards in Monvigliero in Verduno (and Massara after 1910), as well as his parcel in Cannubi, with grapes purchased from other producers in the two villages. In Verduno, he would also purchase grapes from another of the top crus in the town, San Lorenzo, which lies just to the southeast of Monvigliero (at a slightly lower elevation, but with the same good southerly exposition), and he would also buy additional grapes from a few other crus in the village of Barolo as well to produce his blended bottling. His wine business was very much a family affair, with his two brothers working alongside of him at the winery in the early days, and his son, Francesco Burlotto, continuing on the family tradition when he became an adult, while the *Commendatore* remained at the head of the business and in control up until the time of his death in 1927. When the *Commendatore* passed away, he left the family wine business to his son Francesco, who only survived his father by ten years and ran the Burlotto estate until 1937. Francesco Burlotto had six children- three boys and three girls- but, at that time, winegrowing was considered solely the province of men, so the distribution was primarily between Francesco's sons- G. B. Battista, Andrea and Ignazio. Ignazio, the youngest boy, was the only son who was still at home in 1937 at the time of his father's passing, as his two brothers were in Mussolini's army fighting in Africa, and he would inherit the working winery and much of the family's vineyard parcels in Verduno, which by this time included not only Monvigliero, but also plots of vines in the Verduno crus of Neirane and Breri. As Fabio Alessandria notes, "my grandfather, Ignazio, inherited the cellar because he was the person who demonstrated the interest, passion and capacity in this work" of winemaking. G. B. Battista, Francesco Burlotto's oldest son, inherited the *Castello di Verduno* and its cellars, while the middle boy, Andrea inherited the family *cascina* and part of the vineyard of Massara. One of Francesco's three daughters, Teresa, inherited the very small family holdings in Cannubi and the farmhouse there at this time, but she immediately sold these to her brother Ignazio, so that the Cannubi has always been a part of the vineyard patrimony of the domaine of G. B. Burlotto. Presumably, Francesco's other two daughters also inherited vineyard parcels in Massara, Monvigliero and the other Verduno crus. Today, Verduno has several Burlotto family wineries that can all trace back their origins to the division of the family property at the passing of Francesco Burlotto in 1937.

Ignazio Burlotto continued on the family winery, running the property from the time he inherited it from his father in 1937 until he himself passed away in 1968. During his time at the head of the family estate, the Barolo continued to be a blended Barolo, and it would not be until the 1982 vintage that the first cru bottlings of Monvigliero and Cannubi would be produced by

the Burlotto family. However, in top vintages, the Burlotto estate would also produce a blended Barolo Riserva in these days. The winery continued to augment its own vineyard production by purchasing grapes from other growers during these days of blended wines, but throughout his career, Ignazio Burlotto tended to focus chiefly on purchasing fruit from Monvigliero, so that the blended Burlotto Baroli were very strongly influenced by this cru. Ignazio Burlotto and his wife, Margherita, had only one child, a daughter, Marina, so there were initially fears in the climate of those times in Verduno that the family winery would not continue on, but Marina Burlotto wanted to keep the family tradition alive, so she and her mother continued running the estate from 1968 forwards, despite the fact that Marina was still a university student at the time of her father's passing away. From 1968 until 1973, Mother and Daughter Burlotto produced the family wines with the assistance of the winemaking team that had worked with Ignazio, including the long-time Cellar Master, Agostino Sapetti, who had worked alongside of Ignazio Burlotto for many, many years and urged Marina and her mother to keep the property going after the passing of *Signor* Burlotto in 1968. According to Marina Burlotto Alessandria (quoted in an interview in Maurizio Rosso's wonderful book, The Mystique of Barolo), Agostino Sapetti was very important to the family winery during this generational transition, as he "knew the winery inside out and encouraged me to begin production and taught me the ropes" of the wine business. I should note, however, that the conversation with Marina Burlotto Alessandria in The Mystique of Barolo gives the impression that the Burlotto winery did not bottle and produce wine for a ten year period after Ignazio's death in 1968, but this is not the case. When I asked Marina's son, Fabio Alessandria about this impression, he responded that "the wine production in our cellar was never interrupted- my grandmother Margherita, with the help of my mother and some employees who had worked with my grandfather continued the work" of producing and bottling Barolo after my grandfather's passing, and "they continued to purchase grapes from other vine growers" in Monvigliero and tend the family vineyards to produce the Burlotto Baroli each year. So the winery has continued uninterrupted to produce Barolo since the days of the *Commendatore* Burlotto and has remained the flagship estate in Verduno since the very earliest days of the history of Barolo.

In 1973, Marina Burlotto fell in love and married Giuseppe Alessandria, who had earned his degree in oenology in 1971 from the Alba School of Viticulture and Oenology, so it was only for the brief, five year period between 1968 and 1973 that the estate was run by mother and daughter and the seasoned cellar team from Ignazio's days. From 1973 up until the 1982 vintage, they continued to produce only a single, blended Barolo (or the occasional Riserva), as had been the case dating back to the *Commendatore's* days at the head of the family estate. This was the traditional style of Barolo at that time, and though Bruno Giacosa and Renato Ratti had already been producing single vineyard bottlings from the best crus since the mid-1960s, this was far from the norm in Piemonte in the decade of the 1970s and most estates continued to produce blended Baroli. The one nod to modernity made at the Burlotto winery during this period from 1968 to 1982, was that the Barolo here was produced from grapes that had been destemmed and crushed by machine, rather than foot-trodden, as had been the case in the previous generation. However, in 1982, Giuseppe and Marina decided to first begin bottling single cru bottlings of Monvigliero and Cannubi, in addition to their blended Barolo, and they decided at this time to also return to the traditional method of retaining the stems and crushing the fruit by foot for their Monvigliero bottling. In 1986, the Alessandrias decided to add another cru bottling to the Burlotto lineup, as they started offering the Neirane vineyard on its own as well. Today, the

family estate of Comm. G. B. Burlotto is run jointly by Marina and her husband, Giuseppe Alessandria and their son, Fabio Alessandria, who has been a fixture in the Burlotto cellars since he completed his technical degree from the Alba School of Viticulture in 1994, and once earning his university degree in Oenology in 1999, he has been in charge of the winemaking for the estate since that time.



An old photograph of the Burlotto cascina in Cannubi "Valetta" that lies right in the heart of the hill of vines.

Presently, the domaine of G. B. Burlotto produced a full range of Piemontese wines, including a Barolo *Normale*, a blended Barolo bottling called Acclivi (from a handful of crus in Verduno) and the two individual cru bottlings of Monvigliero and Cannubi. As noted above, additionally, from 1986, a third cru was produced from the family's holdings in the Verduno vineyard of Neirane, but the last vintage of this was produced in 1998. The family's 1.3 hectare holding in Neirane are now the backbone of the blended Barolo "Acclivi" bottling, so the Neirane is no longer bottled on its own. Additionally, there is a fine Nebbiolo d'Alba bottling produced from younger vines in the family's Barolo vineyards, lovely bottlings of Dolcetto and Freisa, two distinct cuvées of Barbera and, as is the case with their cousins at the *Castello di Verduno*, still a bottling of the ancient varietal of Pelaverga. The current Burlotto lineup is rounded out with a superb, Rosato called Elatis (made from a blend of Nebbiolo, Pelaverga and Barbera) and a tiny amount of a white wine based on sauvignon blanc. The entire vineyard patrimony of the Burlotto family today runs to twelve hectares, with ten hectares in the village of Verduno and the remainder split between parcels in the villages of Barolo and Roddi. Of these twelve hectares, six are planted to Nebbiolo, with the primary clones being those of Lampia and Michét. The heart and soul of the Burlotto cru holdings is their two hectares in the vineyard of Monvigliero, with the 1.3 hectare parcel in Neirane and the .7 of a hectare in Cannubi also

augmented by parcels of Nebbiolo in other crus in Verduno. Total production of the estate is typically about five thousand cases per year.

Today, the winemaking regimen at Burlotto is quite traditional, with just a touch of modernity blended in, but not all of the wines are treated exactly the same in the cellar, as there is a bit different protocol for the Monvigliero bottling and the three other Barolo cuvées. The Barolo *normale*, Barolo “Acclivi” and Barolo “Vigneto Cannubi” are produced by a fairly traditional manner that includes destemming of the fruit, gentle crushing and a maceration that lasts two to three weeks in old wood fermentation tanks, with manual pump-overs, and then racking off into a combination of both older, large Slavonian oak *Botti* (and some smaller, older French *barriques* for aging the Cannubi) for at least two and a half years for the *Normale* and three years or more for the Acclivi and the Vigneto Cannubi bottlings. The malolactic fermentation for the Barolo *Normale* and the Acclivi bottling takes place in old wood *botti*, but the Cannubi’s malo has taken place in *barrique* at times over the years. The Monvigliero cru is handled a bit differently in the cellar, with a more traditional approach that includes no destemming of the grapes, gentle crushing by foot (almost unheard of in this day and age in Barolo, but once the norm for the wines from this region), followed by a maceration of sixty days, with a submerged cap, prior to decanting the wine off of the skins and placing it again in a combination of older, large *Botti* and French *barriques* for approximately three years of aging prior to bottling. As Marina Alessandria notes, “treading by foot is the method we’ve always adopted” and this allows some whole berries to remain in the fermentation, so that “you obtain greater aroma, more complex perfumes, and above all, softer tannins” in the Monvigliero bottling. The Barolo “Vigneto Neirane”, when it was produced at the estate, was also vinified in the same manner as the Monvigliero, with foot treading and extended maceration with a submerged cap. All of the Baroli cru bottlings and the Acclivi are aged for an additional two years in bottle in the family cellar prior to their release.

I chatted with Fabio Alessandria a bit about the changes in vinification and *elevage* that the Cannubi bottling in particular has undergone over the last decade, and which the interviews with his mother in Maurizio Rosso’s book touch upon at that point in time. Fabio notes that beginning in 1994, “when I finished my technical studies in Alba, the use of *barriques* in the Barolo area was very popular” and wines made in this method were garnering positive “attention from critics and the market.” So, from the 1994 vintage forward, *barriques* were used for the Cannubi bottling at Burlotto, with the malolactic taking place in small barrels and the cru spending some of its vatting time also in French wood, before being transferred to *botti* to finish its aging. Fabio continues, “I was curious about the potential for *barriques* and Barolo and my parents gave me a lot of liberty in the cellars- even if they do not like oak!” As the years went by, Fabio first began to move slowly to larger French barrels for the Cannubi (changing from the 228 liter Burgundy *barriques* to 500 liter barrels, known as *tonneaux*), and at the same time “we also decreased the time of aging in the French barrels for the Cannubi from ten months in 1994 to only fifty days by the 2004 through 2007 vintages,” after which, the wine has always been racked into large *botti* to finish its *elevage*. However, Fabio is also quick to point out that “usually we utilized used *barriques* and *tonneaux* for the Cannubi, not new oak,” and this is why the wines have never appeared particularly oaky to my palate. The experiment with aging the Cannubi in French wood at G. B. Burlotto ended after the 2007 vintage, and from 2008 forwards, the entire *elevage* of this cru now takes place in traditional, large *botti*, like the other Burlotto

Baroli, for as Fabio notes, “we came to understand that for our style of wines the *barriques* and *tonneaux* do not generate any advantages,” and one must remember “that it was only the Cannubi that ever had any *barrique* influence” and the other Baroli have always been one hundred percent traditional in style here.

In addition to the superb Baroli produced here (which are probably some of the most elegant Baroli to be found in all of Piemonte and certainly must be ranked amongst the very top division of classicists in the region), the estate of G. B. Burlotto is also very well known in the Langhe for its championing and leading the renaissance of the Pelaverga grape variety. Along with Burlotto cousins at the *Castello di Verduno*, the Alessandria family has really played a central role in the recovery of this almost extinct grape in Piemonte, and it is now a wine that is growing significantly in popularity and is actually seeing its vineyard acreage expanded after decades of disinterest. As Fabio Alessandria recalls, “we are the unique cellar that always made this varietal,” but in its nadir “in the middle of the twentieth century, my grandfather only made 600 to 700 bottles of Pelaverga each year- solely from our own grapes, for at that time, there did not exist any plantations of Pelaverga in Verduno beyond our vines.” He continues, “the second life of Pelaverga really started in the 1970s, when my parents asked growers in Verduno who had planted some of this grape to harvest it all on the same day (and separately from other grapes), so they could buy the grapes and vinify the wine properly” and have enough production to make the wine viable commercially to Burlotto’s clientele. As readers may have noted in the history of the Burlotto estate above, in the *Commendatore’s* days, this was one of the three original wines offered by the estate and I am sure that he would be delighted if he were still around to see that Pelaverga is making such a comeback thanks to the great efforts of subsequent generations of his family in Verduno.

As I hope the historical section of this article emphasizes, and the following tastings notes will underscore, the estate of G. B. Burlotto is one of the greatest producers of classical wines in all of Piemonte, and remains one of the best-kept secrets in the world of wine. Though there has been some intellectual curiosity when it comes to some of the modern trends that have swept through the Langhe in the last twenty-five years, the Alessandria family has always maintained both feet firmly planted in the traditionalist camp for their wines, and their brief experimentation with *barriques* and *tonneaux* for their Cannubi bottling from 1994 to 2007 was done in such an understated and cautious manner that I was completely unaware of it until reading the interview with Marina Burlotto Alessandria in [The Mystique of Barolo](#), where she alludes to the use of some *barriques* at the time for the Cannubi bottling. I had never noticed it in the wines when I had tasted them previously, and when I asked Fabio Alessandria about this, I began to understand why I had never noticed the influence of *barriques* before in the Cannubi, for he was not using predominantly new oak (probably an occasional barrel would be new if they could not buy enough used ones), the duration of the stay in French cooperage was comparatively short (and got shorter and shorter as the years went by), and there were no other modern gadgets like roto-fermenters in the Burlotto cellars to further modernize the Cannubi. And in the end, as Fabio noted, the use of *barriques* and *tonneaux* for the Cannubi did not add anything to the wine and was stopped with the 2008 vintage. It is this type of enlightened traditionalism at G. B. Burlotto that makes this one of the finest sources for magical Baroli and other classic Piemonte wines (it does not hurt to have great, great *terroirs* to work with either!), and for readers who do not yet know the wines of G. B. Burlotto well, I cannot urge you strongly

enough to stop wasting time and go out and find some of these wines- as you are going to really like what you are tasting!

A great many of the following wines were tasted at a Rare Wine Company event (I do get around to a lot of these over the course of a year!) back in January of 2012. In addition to inviting me to participate in a pair of fine Burlotto events back in 2012, the team at the Rare Wine Company was also kind enough to send me samples of the Barolo Normale to include in this article, so I am deeply indebted to Mannie Berk once again! As readers may have noticed, this piece has been long in the making, but it has been frequently pushed back “to the next issue” for lack of space. I finally got in touch with Fabio Alessandria again this spring to start working on the article in earnest and he graciously sent out samples of the crus from 2008 and 2009 for inclusion in this article, as well as handling a myriad of historical questions about the estate during the writing of the background information on the winery. I am greatly indebted to his generosity with his time (and crus), as the final work in this article took place as Fabio was harvesting the 2013 crop and starting his fermentations in Verduno, and yet he always found time to field just “one or two more questions” while he was busy in the vineyards and cellars! For many years, the wines of Comm. G. B. Burlotto have been the ultimate “insider wines” for lovers of classically inspired Barolo, but in the last year or two, I have begun to notice that they are gaining in recognition in the wider wine world, and are now starting to get more credit for the superb quality of their wines. The growing reputation of these excellent wines is overdue and well-deserved, and I am sure that it would make the Commendatore proud! I should make note of how all of these wines were handled prior to tasting, as proper aeration of (particularly young) Barolo is so important. All of these wines were double-decanted and then allowed a minimum of four to six hours of slow oxygenation prior to my tasting them- this includes the older vintages served at the Rare Wine Company events- so that the wines could properly open up and show a representative side to their current stages of evolution. In my experience, popping and pouring a great bottle of Barolo or Barbaresco simply wastes the wine, and one needs to give these wines proper breathing time if one wants to enjoy all of their beguiling qualities in the glass.

Rosato “Elatis”

The Rosato Elatis bottling is typically comprised of a blend of sixty percent Nebbiolo, thirty percent Pelaverga and ten percent Barbera, though Fabio Alessandria notes that “but the blend can chance a bit depending on the quality of the vintage.” A unique and very tasty wine.

2012 Elatis Rosato- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2012 Elatis Rosato Comm. G. B. Burlotto is a lovely wine, with its light cherry color introducing a fine and fairly deep-pitched bouquet of cherries, orange rind, chalky soil tones and a topnote of dried roses. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely balanced, with a fine core, good acids and very good length and grip. This is not the most complex rosé out there, but it offers up lovely quality and is a wine I would love to drink on warm summer evenings when it is still too hot for a red wine to go with red meats. 2013-2015. **87.**

Dolcetto, Freisa, Barbera, Nebbiolo della Langhe and Pelaverga Bottlings

2012 Dolcetto d’Alba- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2012 Dolcetto from the Burlotto estate is predictively lovely, offering up a deep and vibrant nose of cherries, strawberries, mustard seed, lovely soil tones and a bit of woodsmoke in

the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and beautifully balanced, with a good core, superb soil signature, tangy acids, a bit of tannin and lovely length and grip on the focused and classy finish. I would actually give this wine a couple of years in the cellar to really let it blossom! It is so nice to come across a Dolcetto that is not completely jammy, but one that is delineated and soil-driven. Lovely juice. 2014-2019. **89.**

2012 Freisa Langhe- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2012 Freisa from the Alessandria family is really outstanding, with great aromatic complexity and precision, as well as a deep, complex and nicely structured palate that will need a few years in the cellar to really come into its own. The gorgeously perfumed nose wafts from the glass in a mélange of cherries, licorice, rose petals, gently tarry soil tones, incipient notes of gamebird and a touch of fresh oregano in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and really elegant on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, a fair bit of chewy tannins and excellent focus and grip on the very long, complex and chewy finish. This may well be the best bottle of Freisa I have ever had the pleasure to taste, but tuck it away in the cellar for a minimum of three or four years to let these old school tannins back off. This is a stunning bargain! 2016-2025+. **91.**

2011 Barbera d'Alba- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2011 Barbera d'Alba from G. B. Burlotto is a fine example, but like the Freisa, it could do with a bit of cellaring to let the wine develop some of its secondary layers of complexity and for the tannins to recede a bit more. The bouquet is still quite primary in its blend of red and black cherries, nutskins, a touch of game, lovely soil tones, incipient notes of forest floor and a topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, a fair bit of tannin and outstanding length and focus on the still quite primary finish. This will be excellent in a year or two and will probably be at its peak around 2020. Another stellar value. 2015-2025. **90.**

2012 Nebbiolo della Langhe- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The Verduno origins of this wine are very much in evidence from the moment it is poured, as it is quite light in color and the bouquet is very red fruity and transparent. The utterly refined nose wafts from the glass in a superb combination of cherries, strawberries, licorice, fresh oregano, a superb base of soil and flashes of the autumnal notes that will come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very soil-driven, with outstanding focus and balance, a fair bit of chewy tannins on the backend and excellent length and grip. This probably needs four or five years in the cellar to soften up, but once it does, it is going to be a great glass of nebbiolo. Another great bargain. 2018-2030+. **91.**

2012 Verduno Pelaverga- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2012 Burlotto Pelaverga is a very light colored and translucent red in the glass, with lovely, high-toned aromatics of strawberries, orange peel, white pepper, road tar, a bit of bonfire, plenty of botanical herb tones that are redolent of *aperitivos* such as Amaro Averna. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and beautifully balanced, with superb complexity, tangy acids, a bit of backend tannin and excellent length and grip on the complex finish that closes with a bit of bitterness. This is a really lovely and complex wine that harkens back to an earlier age of wine. It is the first example of Pelaverga that I have ever tried, and I am not sure what I would serve it with, but I really like it. I imagine that the wine will age quite well, as it has lovely balance, and I might be tempted to tuck the 2012 away in the cellar for a couple of years and let it really blossom structurally. A fine bottle. 2015-2025? **90+.**



Barolo Normale

While G. B. Burlotto is best known for its superb cru bottlings- particularly the Monvigliero- their Normale bottlings of Barolo are also outstanding and share the inherent elegance of style that is the calling card of this historic Piemonte estate in Verduno. One should not equate these superb Baroli with say, a village wine in Burgundy, as the Burlotto Normale is a great bottle of Barolo in its own right and in reality not far off the quality of the Acclivi and the two crus here. While I have not had old Normales (not that I would be opposed to this at all!), the young vintages that I have tasted clearly indicate that this is a seriously complex and ageworthy bottling of Barolo and these are some of the most stunning steals to be found in the world of Barolo today. I should make special mention of the stunning 2008, which is a great wine by any stretch of the imagination and still currently widely available in the market. I cannot recommend this wine highly enough for its price and I would hustle to snare some for the cellar, if you are predisposed to superb Barolo at a very, very fair price! One of the nicest things about this lovely Barolo is that the Alessandria family also produces a fair bit of it in half bottle, which is so convenient for wine lists and for those nights when a full bottle is too much wine, but one really wants a glass or two of “great” wine.

2009 Barolo- Comm. G. B. Burlotto (half bottle)

The 2009 Barolo *Normale* from Burlotto is a fine example of the vintage, with the more forward nature of this year clearly in evidence on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is pure,

red fruity and quite accessible in its mélange of cherries, strawberries, a touch of camphor, fresh herb tones, nutskins and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with a good base of well-integrated tannins, lovely focus and complexity and superb length and grip on the moderately chewy finish. When I say that this is a more forward example of Barolo, this should not be construed as immediately drinkable, as the wine clearly needs some bottle age to soften up, but this will not be one of those Baroli that needs twenty years to blossom. 2018-2045+. **90.**

2008 Barolo- Comm. G. B. Burlotto (half bottle)

The 2008 Burlotto *Normale* is a stunning young bottle of Barolo, as it offers up a deep, nascently complex, more seriously structured and far more pure (than the '09) nose of red and black cherries, fennel seed, wonderful soil tones, a touch of licorice, incipient notes of camphor, fresh oregano and hints of the autumnal layers to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with great focus and balance, ripe, substantial tannins, great acids and stellar grip on the very, very long, youthful and inherently elegant finish. This is a glorious synthesis of the refined style of Burlotto and their Verduno fruit with the classic structure of this superb Piemontese vintage. A great wine and another absolute steal! 2022-2050+. **92+.**

2007 Barolo- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2007 Burlotto Barolo *Normale*, like the 2009, shows a more forward character due to the style of this vintage and it will really not be too many years before this wine is drinking very well indeed. The bouquet is a nice blend of baked cherries, blossoming notes of forest floor, nutskins, camphor, a bit of coffee, lovely herb tones redolent of mustard seed and oregano and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite open-knit, with a good core, blossoming layers of secondary complexity already showing over the horizon, some good, old school, chewy tannins and fine length and grip on the fairly low acid finish. I really like this wine, which should drink well with another four or five years of bottle age, but it is certainly not in the league of the utterly classic 2008 version. 2017-2035. **89.**

2006 Barolo- Comm. G. B. Burlotto (half bottle)

The 2006 Burlotto *Normale* Barolo is another excellent wine, cut in the more structured style of the 2008, rather than the more open-knit styles of the 2009 or 2007 versions, but it does not possess quite the same depth and purity as the glorious '08. The bouquet is starting to show the very first signs of secondary development in its blend of black cherries, camphor, a bit of roasted game, gentle tariness, complex soil tones, herb tones and incipient autumnal notes in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a fine core of fruit, superb soil inflection, firm tannins and a long, but currently, pretty shut down finish. The *sous bois* notes that will eventually define this wine are already starting to perk up on the long backend, but I would give this wine at least three or four years in the cellar to allow its tannins to soften up a bit more before thinking of cracking it- even in half bottle- as it is in a pretty closed down state at the moment. It will clearly be a very good bottle once it opens up again. 2017-2035+. **89+.**

Barolo “Acclivi”

The Barolo “Acclivi” is a blended cuvée that incorporated production from the vineyards of Neirane, Monvigliero and Rocche Olmo- all of which lie in the village of Verduno. As Fabio Alessandria observes, “the Acclivi bottling is made within the old concept of Barolo Riserva, where we seek to show the best expression of the vintage from these three vineyards in Verduno

through a blended wine”. The Acclivi bottling was first produced in the 1999 vintage. This is a very elegant and classically red fruity rendition of Barolo- not too surprising when one remembers that this is made entirely from Verduno fruit and this township has long had a reputation as producing some of the Barolo region’s most elegant wines. The percentages of each vineyard that goes into the Acclivi bottling from Burlotto is different depending on the characteristics of the vintage, as the goal is to maximize the quality of the cuvée by adapting the blend according to which vineyards had the greatest successes in any give growing season. So, for example, in the 2008 Acclivi, the percentages are forty percent Monvigliero, forty percent Rocche Olmo and twenty percent Neirane. In the 2009 vintage, this changes to forty percent each from Neirane and Rocche Olmo and twenty percent from Monvigliero. What I find very interesting about the aromatic and flavor profile of this wine (based on the two vintages that I have tasted so far) is that the wine is quintessentially red fruity in style, despite the fact that the Neirane cru is a very important component here, and Neirane tends to be a rather black fruity wine in the firmament of the Verduno crus. I guess this just shows the strong personality of Monvigliero in the blend, and suggests that the wines from Rocche Olmo (which I have never tasted on their own) are also rather red fruity in character. I really loved the inherent elegance and transparency found in the Acclivi bottling from G. B. Burlotto and look forward to getting to know this bottling on more intimate terms in the years to come.



The open top, wood fermentation tanks used for all of the Baroli bottlings at G. B. Burlotto.

2009 Barolo “Acclivi”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

Fabio Alessandria has made absolutely delicious examples of this ripe vintage, with the inherent elegance of the Acclivi bottling very much in evidence in the 2009 version. The '09 Acclivi delivers a lovely bouquet of cherries, strawberries, gentle tarry tones, anise, fresh oregano, a bit of high-end spice tones and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and generous on the attack, with lovely focus and mid-palate depth, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is really not a bad drink today by any stretch of the imagination, but I would give it six or seven years in the cellar to really let its secondary layers emerge! 2020-2050. **92.**

2008 Barolo “Acclivi”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2008 Burlotto Acclivi is a superb wine in the making, wafting from the glass in an very pure and precise constellation of cherries, strawberries, very gentle notes of road tar, oregano, *garrigue* (remember forty percent of the blend is from Monvigliero in this vintage), fine soil tones and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with firm, well-integrated tannins, lovely mid-palate concentration, nascent complexity and excellent length and grip on the youthful and focused finish. This will be excellent, but it will not offer up quite the same possibility for early drinking as the 2009 Acclivi. Qualitatively, there is not a wide margin between the '08 and '09 Acclivi, but stylistically, I prefer the utterly classic 2008 version! 2023-2060. 92+.

Barolo “Vigneto Neirane”

The Vigneto Neirane bottling, which hails from a 1.3 hectare parcel of vines in the Neirane vineyard in Verduno (though only one hectare of this is planted to nebbiolo), was first bottled on its own by the Burlotto estate in the 1986 vintage, and was discontinued after the 1998 vintage. From 1999 forwards, this parcel of nebbiolo has been reserved for inclusion in the new blended cuvée of Barolo “Acclivi”. As Fabio Alessandria notes, “we stopped producing the single vineyard bottling from Neirane when we began production of the Acclivi, as this is a very important part of the blend each year in that bottling.” The Neirane vineyard lies at a slightly higher elevation than Monvigliero, topping out at 340 meters above sea level, with a due westerly exposition and a bit more clay in its base of soil, so that, according to Fabio, “we always produce a wine from Neirane that is a little bit darker in color, richer in fruit and in warmer vintages, also has more power than that from Monvigliero.” While I have only had the pleasure of tasting two vintages of Neirane, it is my distinct impression that this was the most black fruity of the crus here at Burlotto, with more of a black cherry profile, as opposed to the more overtly red fruity style of a wine such as Monvigliero, and a bit more masculine stylistic bent, with notes of roasted game, saddle leather and autumnal seasonings very much part of its profile. As it is a Verduno cru, it tends to come forward a bit on the earlier side than wines from sturdier townships such as Serralunga or Monforte, but with the ability to also age long and gracefully. The evidence that the wine matures a bit sooner than some of its neighbors can be readily seen in the lovely 1996 Neirane, which is already starting to reach its plateau of peak drinkability at age seventeen, whereas a great many of the '96 wines from more structured villages are still way too young for primetime drinking. While the Alessandria family has not produced the cru of Neirane since the 1998 vintage, it is a wine that I would not hesitate to pick up if I crossed paths with older vintages at auction. It was probably the least elegant of the three crus at Burlotto (in the fine company of Cannubi and Monvigliero, that could be said of an awful lot of crus- not just Neirane!), but it is a really complete and classy wine in its own right and well worth having in the cellar if the opportunity presents itself. Do to the fact that the Burlotto estate no longer produces a Neirane cru bottling on its own, my gut instinct is that this wine will offer up outstanding value if one is lucky enough to come across bottles of older vintages, as it certainly does not possess the same “star power” in its name as Cannubi or Monvigliero.

1996 Barolo “Vigneto Neirane”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The first bottle I tasted of the '96 Neirane was served to me by a very good friend in Germany, as he had purchased a bottle of this and the '88 Neirane at auction. It was our impression that the two bottles had been stored slightly warm somewhere along the way and

were not quite one hundred percent pristine, but happily, a friend here in New York had some in his cellar and we had a chance to drink it together prior to this report being finished. The '96 Neirane is a classic example of the vineyard (or at least that is my impression- my experience with this bottling is hardly deep!), offering up a black fruity and blossoming nose of black cherries, new leather, roasted game, fresh herb tones, a touch of bonfire, Burgundy-like notes of cola and forest floor, a touch of nuttiness and a topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and black fruity in personality, with a fine core, modest tannins and a long, complex and autumnal finish. A lovely bottle that is now into its apogee of maturity, but shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. 2013-2035. **91.**

1988 Barolo “Vigneto Neirane”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

Sadly, this bottle of the 1988 Vigneto Neirane was also purchased at auction in Europe and, it too, seemed to have been stored just a touch warm somewhere along the way. Despite this likelihood, the wine was drinking very well (maybe ninety percent of a pristine bottle?), offering up a deep and complex nose of desiccated cherries, licorice, road tar, forest floor, camphor, fresh oregano and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent in the classic Burlotto style, with fine focus and balance, still a bit of remaining tannin and a long, chewy and tarry finish. This is a good drink in this condition, but I would love to cross paths with a bottle I knew to be totally pristine, as I suspect this wine would be more vibrant and even better. 2018-2045+? **89+?**

Barolo “Vigneto Monvigliero”

While not as recognized today as was the case back in the Commendatore’s salad days (when Monvigliero was often compared to Cannubi as the very greatest wine produced in the entire Barolo region- at least by residents in Verduno!), Monvigliero is clearly one of the greatest crus in all of Barolo. The twenty hectare vineyard lies at the northernmost limit of the village of Verduno’s land under vine, with a small snippet of the vineyard cascading over the crest of the hillside and actually facing towards the northeast (though no nebbiolo is planted in this section), and the entire vineyard ranges from about 220 to 300 meters above sea level as one ascends up from the lowest end of the rows of vines up to the summit of the slope. The exposition of Monvigliero ranges from southeast to southwest, but the vast majority of the hillside faces due south, and it is generally recognized that the top section of the vineyard is the finest sub-parcel, as this is the sunniest area, and this is where the Commendatore Burlotto purchased his large tract of the vineyard back in the 1860s. The Commendatore’s large parcel has been split up among at least three branches of the Burlotto family over the years (and perhaps more), so that today, the G. B. Burlotto estate’s portion of the vineyard is two hectares. These two hectares of vines are spread between five distinct parcels, with the age of the vines ranging from twenty years-old for the most recent plantations up to sixty-five years of age. As Fabio Alessandria notes, the soils in Monvigliero contain a very high percentage of limestone, which he estimates as forty percent of the soil composition, with the remainder a blend of tuffeau and sand, so that the soils are very noticeably white in color and also drain very well in wetter years. Monvigliero tends to produce one of the most elegant crus in all of Barolo, and it is no doubt that it was this characteristic that originally attracted the attention of the Commendatore Burlotto to this vineyard (as well as Cannubi- another supremely elegant terroir). The wine tends to be very red fruity (often with a preponderance of strawberries in its aromatic and flavor profiles) and very transparent down to its calcareous soil in most vintages, and often shows a structural elegance that allows earlier access than many of the top crus in Barolo- but, still with the balance and

stuffing to age very long and gracefully as well. There is also a very spicy signature to all the Burlotto Monviglieros that I have had the pleasure to taste (which Mannie Berk of the Rare Wine Company compares to the “garrigue” found in some Rhône wines) that really makes this wine pretty easy to spot in blind tastings of Baroli. This is one of the great, great wines of Barolo and deserves to be as renowned today as it was in the Commendatore’s day!



The white soils of Monvigliero can clearly be seen from this photo of the G. B. Burlotto parcels of vines.

2009 Barolo “Vigneto Monvigliero”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

Monvigliero is one of the most elegant of the crus of Barolo, and this is very apparent in this forward and relatively sumptuous vintage. The beautiful nose wafts from the glass in a lovely mélange of strawberry jam, cherries, *garrigue*, a superbly complex base of chalky soil tones, fresh oregano, gentle notes of woodsmoke and perhaps just a hint of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, moderate, quite suave tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and quite wide open (for young Barolo mind you!) finish. A lovely example of the vintage, the 2009 Monvigliero from Burlotto is certainly approachable already, but I would tuck it away for a handful of years and allow its secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. 2020-2050. **92+**.

2008 Barolo “Vigneto Monvigliero”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2008 Monvigliero has started to blossom over the course of the eighteen months between the time I first tasted it and the bottle I just tasted for this article. This is a great and utterly classic vintage of Monvigliero on the way, as the wine soars from the glass in a youthful and very complex constellation of strawberries, cherries, *garrigue*, incipient *sous bois*, gamebirds, fresh oregano, a touch of cedar, rose petals and a great base of soil. On the palate the

wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly classic in its structure (showing significantly more precision than the more generous 2009 version), with a rock solid core, suave tannins and a very, very long, focused and classy finish. A great vintage of Monvigliero in the making! 2020-2060. 94.

2007 Barolo “Vigneto Monvigliero”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2007 Monvigliero from Burlotto is a beautiful example of the vintage, with the inherent refinement of this great *terroir* very much in evidence as the bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, orange peel, woodsmoke, coffee, gamebirds, incipient notes of *sous bois* and a gentle topnote of fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very suave on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, superb transparency, great focus and grip and a very long, moderately tannic and perfectly-balanced finish. This is quite accessible for a young vintage of Monvigliero, and it is really a pleasure to drink even now, but I would be strongly inclined to give this another five to ten years in the cellar to really let its secondary layers emerge completely. 2018-2040+. 92+.

2006 Barolo “Vigneto Monvigliero”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2006 Burlotto Monvigliero is a deeper and more structured wine than the lovely 2007, but this is destined to be a reference point vintage for this wine in the fullness of time. The stunning nose is closing down now for an extended period of hibernation, but still offers up a lovely blend of cherries, roses, road tar, a touch of anise, camphor, woodsmoke and an absolutely magical base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid, sappy core of fruit, firm tannins, excellent focus and balance and a very long, soil-driven and youthful finish. This will be a great vintage of Monvigliero, but patience will be required. 2022-2060+. 94.

2005 Barolo “Vigneto Monvigliero”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2005 Barolo “Vigneto Monvigliero” from G. B. Burlotto is another great classic in the making and picking a favorite between this and the superb 2006 version is going to be a great pleasure over the coming decades, as the debate is likely to go on for many, many years! The superb and youthful nose offers up a blend of red and black cherries, gentle tariness, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of coffee, gamebirds, fresh herbs and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is very pure, full-bodied and vibrant, with a rock solid core, ripe, suave tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused and tangy finish. I love the depth and balance of this vintage of Monvigliero! 2018-2045+. 94.

2004 Barolo “Vigneto Monvigliero”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2004 Monvigliero is just starting to stir on the nose and palate and offers up a superb aromatic constellation of cherries, camphor, gentle nutty tones, incipient notes of *sous bois*, coffee, gamebirds and that great signature of chalky Monvigliero soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and utterly suave on the attack, with very good mid-palate depth, moderate tannins and lovely elegance and focus on the long and perfectly poised finish. There is perhaps just a bit more mid-palate stuffing to the 2005 and 2006 versions, but this supremely elegant vintage of Monvigliero will be absolutely something when it has fully blossomed. Give it another four or five years to really reach its apogee- it should drink beautifully for several decades. 2015-2040. 93.

2003 Barolo “Vigneto Monvigliero”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2003 Burlotto Monvigliero is a very ripe wine, but the inherent elegance of the *terroir* of Monvigliero has offered up some purity in this torrid summer. The deep-pitched bouquet is a blend of black cherries, venison, damp soil, road tar, fresh rosemary and damp

wood. On the palate the wine deep, full-bodied and quite soft for Monvigliero, with a solid core, low acids and a fairly short, tarry finish. This is a very good effort for a 2003, but it is hardly a great vintage for this consistently excellent bottling. 2012-2025. **86.**

2001 Barolo “Vigneto Monvigliero”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2001 Monvigliero from Burlotto is a lovely and still quite youthful example of the vintage that offers up a fine and very classic nose of cherries, dried roses, orange peel, camphor, a gentle base of road tar, anise, a hint of coffee bean and a beautifully complex and refined base of soil that will turn autumnal with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and exudes the elegance of this fine *terroir*, with a superb core of fruit, fine-grained, but fairly substantial tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. This will be a terrific vintage of Monvigliero. 2018-2040+. **94.**

1995 Barolo “Vigneto Monvigliero”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 1995 Monvigliero from Burlotto has now reached its apogee of maturity and is drinking very well indeed. The complex and nicely autumnal nose offers up a mélange of red and black cherries, road tar, a touch of spit-roasted game, forest floor, leather, porcini and a dollop of fresh oregano in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with a nice base of relatively dark soil tones, modest tannins and fine length and grip on the tarry finish. This is not the most elegant vintage of Monvigliero, but the wine is just beginning to drink well and should offer up plenty of pleasure over the coming couple of decades. 2012-2035. **91.**

1989 Barolo “Vigneto Monvigliero”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto (served from double magnum)

The 1989 Monvigliero is a beautifully mature wine that offers up all of the depth and purity of the '89 vintage in a very elegant, refined format that is so typical of this lovely *terroir*. The complex and mature bouquet is a lovely mélange of cherries, orange peel, gentle notes of camphor, gamebirds, forest floor, fresh oregano and a gentle topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very refined, with lovely mid-palate depth, melting tannins, good acids and outstanding length and grip on the wide open and beautifully balanced finish. A lovely wine that is now drinking at its apogee, but will continue to cruise along for years and years. 2012-2035+. **92.**

1985 Barolo “Vigneto Monvigliero”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto (served from double magnum)

The 1985 Monvigliero is an utterly stunning and *à point* example of the vintage, which offers up great complexity and refinement on both the nose and palate. The utterly stunning and still quite youthfully vibrant bouquet delivers scents of black cherries, licorice, game, camphor, gentle tariness, bonfires, cherry skin and a glorious base of autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still fairly powerful (particularly out of double mag), with still a bit of ripe tannin, excellent focus and grip and a very long, perfectly balanced finish. Today, this is a hair better than the 1989 Monvigliero, but I wonder if this will still be the case a decade from now. Out of double magnum, the 1985 Burlotto Monvigliero could still do with a few more years of bottle age to fully blossom, but I expect it is absolutely stellar to drink right now out of regular-sized format. 2015-2050. **93+.**

Barolo “Vigneto Cannubi”

The G. B. Burlotto estate first produced a Vigneto Cannubi cru bottling in the 1982 vintage, though this has been a part of the Burlotto vineyard stable since the early days of the Commendatore. As noted above, the estate owns a .7 hectare slice of Cannubi, located on the lower slope in the four hectare subsection of the vineyard known as “Cannubi Valetta”. The

Commendatore also bought a farmhouse along with these vines back in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and this farmhouse (or cascina) is located right in the heart of the slope in Valetta as well. The DOCG rules allow the wine to be labeled as either Cannubi Valetta or simply as Cannubi, and in fact, the only producer with vines here in Valetta who actually labels the wines as Cannubi Valetta is the Marchesi di Barolo estate, with all the other producers with parcels in Valetta simply labeling the wine as Cannubi. Historically, this was always the case and the Valetta name is more useful as a marker to show where a producer's vines are located on the hill of Cannubi, as there is effectively no qualitative difference between grapes grown in the prime sectors of Valetta (or Muscatel or San Lorenzo- two other exceptional subsections of the hill of Cannubi) and those grown in Cannubi proper. As is the case with Monvigliero, there is a high percentage of limestone in the soils of Cannubi, which again makes this one of the most elegant of all the crus in Barolo, but the limestone content is a bit higher in Monvigliero than it is in Cannubi, so this Burlotto cru tends to be a bit more powerful in profile and a bit slower to unfold than the very transparent Monvigliero. This is not to say that the Burlotto Cannubi is not also a very elegant rendition of Barolo, but it is a bigger wine than Monvigliero and is not as gloriously defined by its terroir right out of the blocks as the Monvigliero. Typically, there will be a touch of black cherries to go with the red in the Burlotto Cannubi- at least when the wine is on the younger side- along with a beautiful base of soil tones and classic notes of camphor, anise, oregano and gentle tarry tones in the younger wines. Sadly, my experience with the Burlotto Cannubi is not as deep as with their lovely Monvigliero, as I have only tasted back as far as the 2004 vintage, so I do not really have a sense of how this wine's personality blossoms over extended cellaring. But, there is no doubting their potential to age long and gracefully, as the younger vintages I have tasted have all been absolutely stellar.

2009 Barolo “Vigneto Cannubi”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2009 Cannubi from G. B. Burlotto is a very fine example of this vintage, delivering a fine bouquet of red and black cherries, anise, gentle notes of tariness, a superbly complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke, a dollop of fresh herbs and just a bit of upper register spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a fine core, ripe tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very long, balanced and still quite primary finish. This is not quite as forward in profile as the 2009 Monvigliero, but it does share the profile of the '09 vintage and the likelihood of much earlier drinking than is the case with the more classically structured 2008 Cannubi. A lovely and very pure rendition of the 2009 vintage. 2022-2050+. **92+**.

2008 Barolo “Vigneto Cannubi”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2008 Burlotto Cannubi is a classic wine in the making, offering up a deep, youthful and outstandingly complex bouquet of red and black cherries, complex soil nuances, a touch of black licorice, fresh oregano, hints of the gamebirds to come and discreet topnote of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe, perfectly integrated tannins, outstanding focus and balance, tangy acids and great length and grip on the poised and still very youthful finish. Like so many vintages of Burlotto Baroli, this wine will be approachable relatively early by the standards of traditionally-styled Barolo, but I would keep it buried in the cellar for at least another dozen years and really let time unlock the magical complexity of Cannubi! 2025-2060+. **93+**.

2007 Barolo “Vigneto Cannubi”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2007 Cannubi bottling from Fabio Alessandria is not quite as transparent as the Monvigliero in this vintage, but it too shares lovely elegance on both the nose and palate. The fine bouquet is also probably a touch deeper, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, a touch of anise, gentle tarry notes, a beautifully complex base of soil, woodsmoke and fresh oregano in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with ripe, fairly firm tannins, lovely focus and grip and a very long, well-balanced and youthful finish. 2020-2050. **93.**

2006 Barolo “Vigneto Cannubi”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2006 Burlotto Cannubi is an absolute classic in the making, but the wine is quite closed at the present time and needs an extended stay in the cellar before it will start to blossom. The superbly promising nose offers up scents of red and black cherries, gentle notes of black licorice, road tar, lovely soil tones and incipient notes of both bonfire and gamebirds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, closed and absolutely rock solid at the core, with great elegance in the making, ripe, suave tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very well-balanced, primary and long finish. This will be a dynamite bottle of Cannubi in another dozen years or so, but it is still a puppy and opening up bottles any time soon will simply be a waste of what promised to be a brilliant and very long-lived wine. 2025-2075. **94.**

2005 Barolo “Vigneto Cannubi”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2005 Cannubi from Burlotto is a very young wine, but it has all of the constituent components one could ask for to produce a long and very superb life in bottle. The deep, young and excellent nose offers up scents of cherries, licorice, road tar, woodsmoke, lovely minerality and incipient notes of camphor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and traditionally structured, with the refinement of Cannubi nicely harnessed by the broad shoulders of young, old school Barolo. The wine is rock solid at the core, with fine focus, firm tannins and excellent length and grip on the tangy and youthfully complex finish. This wine still needs plenty of time, but it is going to be outstanding at its apogee and should prove to be very long-lived. 2018-2040. **93.**

2004 Barolo “Vigneto Cannubi”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 2004 Cannubi is the oldest vintage I have yet tasted from this bottling at G. B. Burlotto (though I have every intention of rectifying this situation as soon as I cross paths with an older vintage or two of this great wine!) and the wine is a superb example of this outstanding vintage. The deep and vibrant nose soars from the glass in a constellation of red and black cherries, incipient notes of gamebird, bitter chocolate, camphor, a touch of fresh almond, cherry skin and a beautifully complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with outstanding balance, a superb core of pure fruit, ripe tannins and superb length and grip on the young and perfectly balanced finish. This will be a great bottle of Cannubi in the fullness of time! 2018-2050. **93+.**



Blended Barolo

Up until the 1982 vintage, the estate of G. B. Burlotto only produced a blended bottlings of Baroli, from their parcels in Monvigliero, Neirane, Rocche Olmo and Cannubi, as well as from grapes purchased from growers in other vineyards with whom the Burlotto family had long-standing relationships. While the wine since the Commendatore's days had always been a blend of various crus, the focus here was on a Barolo that emphasized elegance and perfume, for which the fruit from the vineyards in the village of Verduno had always been renowned (as was also the case with the wines from Cannubi). Consequently, the Burlotto blended Barolo always included a preponderance of fruit from Verduno in the cuvée (in the decade of the 1960s, almost all the purchased fruit that the Burlotto family added to their Barolo bottlings hailed from other growers in Monvigliero), with only a small percentage of the blend made up of grapes from Cannubi and other crus where the family purchased grapes. As I noted above, in top vintages, the Burlotto family since the days of the Commendatore, would produce also a small amount

of Barolo Riserva to augment their production of their blended Normale. It too would be a blended wine, but one assumes that the old Burlotto Riservas would generally be drawn from either Monvigliero or Cannubi fruit. I have never had the pleasure to taste any of the old Riservas from G. B. Burlotto, but have had a couple of the old Normale blended wines.

1967 Barolo- Comm. Comm. G. B. Burlotto

The 1967 Barolo from Burlotto is a gorgeous example of the vintage, with its significant percentage of Monvigliero and Cannubi in the blend certainly adding a bit of signature red fruity elegance and transparency to the wine. The gorgeous and fully mature nose wafts from the glass

in a mix of cherries, orange peel, fresh oregano, forest floor, dried rose petals, coffee and bonfires in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and beautifully transparent, with still very good mid-palate depth, outstanding focus and balance, melted tannins, bright, perfectly integrated acids and outstanding length and grip on the elegant finish. This is a beautiful example of this underrated and very high class vintage, and it also shows that Verduno Barolo, despite its propensity of come forward sooner than Barolo from the eastern side of the valley, has no difficulties lasting for many, many decades. 2012-2025+. **91.**

1964 Barolo- Comm. Comm. G. B. Burlotto

Sadly, our bottle of the 1964 Burlotto Barolo was not on one hundred percent on form, but there are some good elements here that clearly indicate that a sound bottle would be superb. The wine is a touch spritzy, but offers up some classic notes of dried cherries, orange rind, onion skin and bonfires on the nose, as well as an overt element of maderization from the crumbly cork. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and beautifully transparent, but again, oxidative on the backend. I did not score this bottle, but hope one day to have the good fortune to cross paths with a sound example, as I am sure this is a terrific wine.

ANDREW WILL CELLARS
WASHINGTON STATE'S CLARET-STYLED MAESTRO



Andrew Will Cellars started out quietly in a tiny facility Seattle, with the first vintage of 1989 produced in a building that measured all of sixty feet in length and ten feet in width! In fact, owner and winemaker Chris Camarda was able to turn out his first five vintages from this cozy location, producing roughly two thousand cases a year in this small facility in an industrial section of Seattle. Finally, in the summer of 1994, Chris and his wife Annie moved the family home and winery to their present location on Vashon Island, just south of Seattle, where the couple had purchased a five acre plot and built their home and the new, far more spacious winery facilities. They spent a bit more than a decade together here with their family on Vashon Island, but, sadly, Annie Camarda passed away in 2005. The winery takes its name from Chris' and Annie's son, Will, and their nephew, Andrew (son of the winery's other founding partner, Chris' brother-in-law, Tommy Martino, who is no longer involved with the estate), who were very small lads when the winery produced its first vintage in 1989 (today, Will Camarda is actually doing a *stage* in one of the top cellars in Burgundy and on his way to a winemaking career—presumably at the head of the family winery). Since day one, this has always been a working winery, with no fancy tasting rooms or emphasis on Disney-like public tours, just outstanding winemaking year in and year out, and a single-mindedness to produce superb, age-worthy wines

from some of Washington's finest vineyards sites. The two original vineyards that Chris started with all the way back in 1989: Ciel du Cheval Vineyard and Champoux Vineyard, are still two of his principal grape sources for his superb, claret-styled reds that must be ranked at the very summit of Washington state wines and amongst the very finest wines to be found from anywhere in America.

Like many winemakers, Chris Camarda came to the world of wine production as a second career, having worked in the Seattle restaurant scene for nearly fifteen years prior to launching Andrew Will Cellars in 1989, and he continued his restaurant management duties for several years while the winery was in its early phase. As he notes, "I worked in restaurants from 1975 until 1996- starting as a waiter and soon beginning to buy wines for the restaurant list at my first job." He continues, "this morphed into my becoming a manager and wine buyer at my last restaurant, where I worked for nearly fifteen years," and Chris continued to hold this position for the first several years of the winery's existence, while Andrew Will was getting up and running in earnest. In fact, the very first winemaking he tried his hand at was done in the basement of his mother's house in Seattle, while he was still working in the restaurant industry, as he produced his first wines from fruit he purchased from the 1987 and 1988 vintages. Chris recalls that "the 1987 was bad- but at least I learned a lot- and the 1988 was as good as some of the wines I was buying and this led me to get the winery bonded in time for the 1989 vintage." The initial Andrew Will releases included varietally-based bottlings of cabernet sauvignon and merlot from 1989, with the roster also including a single vineyard bottling of merlot from the Ciel du Cheval Vineyard on Red Mountain. This would become one of Chris' most important vineyard sources over the years and it continues to be one of the mainstays in his lineup of wines. From its earliest days, Andrew Will Cellars has been a predominantly red wine-producing estate, with an occasional white wine produced in very small quantities- mostly out of personal curiosity for Chris, rather than as a commercially viable facet of the winery. These infrequent white wines have included some chenin blanc bottlings in the vintages of the mid-1990s, a bit of pinot gris, sauvignon blanc, semillon, and even a very small batch of viognier last year. But, for all intents and purposes, Andrew Will Cellars is primarily a red wine domaine, and this is where the superb reputation of the winery has been earned.

Today, the vineyard roster has been pared back a bit to only include fruit from four specific vineyard sites. These included Champoux Vineyard and Discovery Vineyard in Horse Heaven Hills, Two Blondes Vineyards in Yakima Valley, and Ciel du Cheval Vineyard on Red Mountain. Besides working with a smaller roster of vineyard sources, the other big change that has occurred at Andrew Will in the second decade of its history has been Chris' decision to no longer produce single varietal wines (for the most part), preferring to focus on blended wines from each of his vineyard sources, with the wines taking their names from the vineyards from which they originate. For the first dozen years of the winery's existence, Chris Camarda produced wines at Andrew Will that were labeled by varietal, with a lineup that included primarily bottlings of merlot, cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc. There were wines labeled simply by varietal, as well as occasional single vineyard varietal wines such as the aforementioned 1989 vintage of Ciel du Cheval Vineyard Merlot. But, by the turn of the century, Chris had begun to think that a more interesting expression of the various *terroirs* that he worked with could be reached by blending grapes from each vineyard source, to take advantage of the relative strengths of each grape variety in a given vintage and give a more complete expression to each

underlying soil signature in the various top vineyards in which he worked. So, commencing in the 2001 vintage, the vast majority of Andrew Will wines became single vineyard blends, with the four varietals of merlot, cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and petit verdot making up the *cépages* of each bottling in much the same style of a top château in Bordeaux. The precise blend of each wine is dependent on both the quality of each grape variety in each vineyard in a given vintage, and also how the personalities of each wine fit most seamlessly into the final blend from a given vineyard. There has remained an occasional single varietal bottling of cabernet sauvignon or merlot, but these usually represent juice that has not gone into one of the blends and is sold off at a lower price, with the exception of the Discovery Vineyard cabernet sauvignon, which is a relatively new addition to the lineup at Andrew Will Cellars.

Today, the winery produces roughly forty-five hundred cases of wine each year, with the vast majority of these the three single vineyard red wine bottlings from Ciel du Cheval, Champoux and Two Blondes Vineyards, as well as a proprietary red called Sorella, which was first produced in the 1994 vintage. All four of these wines are classic Bordeaux blends that include varying percentages of cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc and petit verdot (depending on the strengths of the vintage and the vineyard). There is also a small amount of sangiovese produced from a parcel planted in the Ciel du Cheval Vineyard, which I have not yet had the pleasure to taste, as well as the aforementioned, occasional foray into the world of white wines in a small way. However, as Chris noted, “as much as I tried to move away from making single varietal wines,” once he fell for the fruit from the Discovery Vineyard he knew he would “have to try my hand at making wine from it, even though there was no merlot or cabernet franc planted” here, so he does now produce a straight cabernet sauvignon from this vineyard source since the 2010 vintage (by the way, the note on this 2010 Discovery Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon appeared back in Issue 45 and is not reprinted here, but the wine is absolutely stellar and well worth a special search of the marketplace to find a few bottles to tuck away for the long haul- it is a great, great wine). In the past, Chris has also produced a bit of Syrah, with the cuvée named after his wife, Annie Camarda. Additionally, as noted above, there continue to be a very small quantity of single varietal bottlings produced from the grapes that do not fit into the final blends of the single vineyard wines (often from the younger vines in each vineyard), and which are sold at a lower price under the Columbia Valley denomination and are made for drinking on the earlier side.

The reds wines from Andrew Will all tend to be handled essentially the same in the cellars, with the exception of the sangiovese, which is never raised in anything but older barrels, with the wines raised in approximately twenty-five to thirty-five percent new oak in a given vintage and the *elevage* lasting around twenty-one months prior to racking and bottling. After bottling, the red wines are given another year of bottle aging in the cellars (more or less) prior to their release on the market. Chris has experimented just a bit with the oak that he uses for his red wines, with his original barrels hailing from the French coopers of Taransaud and Demptos, but in the 1995 vintage, he switched the second *tonnelier* from Demptos to Gamba, and has stuck with these two sources for his barrel needs. But, as he says, “I was never much of a barrel guy- I always hope it does not show, but is present in the wines.” Across the board, these single vineyard bottlings are amongst the most superb wines made in the US today and are built to age long and gracefully in the cellars and only reveal their entire complement of aromatic and flavor complexities in the fullness of time. Stylistically, there really are a some similarities on both the

nose and palate from the more recent releases with the wines of Cheval Blanc, and this is not just my imagination running wild, as the blended wines since 2001 have really derived a lot of their personalities from their merlot and cabernet franc components- at least to my palate- despite some vintages having a preponderance of cabernet sauvignon in their blends.



Chris Camarda has experimented a bit with the ripeness levels of his grapes over the years, starting out with most of his wines in the early days coming in around thirteen percent in alcohol, and then picking a bit later in the vintages from the 2001 vintage forwards, but after a decade of vintages coming in between the high thirteens and mid-fourteens in alcohol, the 2010 and 2011 vintages here saw a return to alcohol levels back down in the thirteen percent range again. I should note, that even in the riper vintages where the wines came in consistently above fourteen percent, I have never once noticed signs of overripeness or pruniness in the bouquets or on the palates of these wines, and with the occasional higher-octane wine that has not delighted me, it has usually been that the backend of the wine has shown just a touch of uncovered alcohol. In my experience with the vintages from the early to mid-2000s, the wines have aged very well at the slightly higher octane levels, but I suspect that they will not be quite as long-lived as the wines made in earlier years and which were all in the thirteen percent range. Of course, the trade-off would have been that these lower octane vintages back in the decade of the 1990s would have been quite a bit less generous out of the blocks- particularly the cabernet sauvignon wines from back in this era- and they would not have offered the same fairly early appeal that wines like the 2007 Sorella or 2008 Ciel du Cheval have delivered right from the outset. I am sure that there are plenty of very loyal Andrew Will clients that prefer the riper styled wines from the decade of the 2000s, but as much as I admire those very well-made wines, I find that the more interesting explorations of the various *terroirs* that Chris works with today are found in those older wines at the lower octane levels and I have very, very high expectations for the 2010s and 2011s here. Both styles of Andrew Will wines are exemplary, but I would rank the slightly less ripe wines as the finest that Chris has crafted during his career and amongst the greatest Bordeaux-styled wines ever produced in America.

When I asked Chris about the gradual climb upwards in ripeness during the first decade of the new millennium (and it is not a dramatic rise, just an inching up of one or two tenths of a percent ABV over a few vintages), he observed that “I was trying to define ripeness of the wine as a balanced artifact, not as something that had to fit into any place at all” and “I was looking at all this as the weather doing whatever it does and handing me fruit that each year is more acutely tuned to the weather” of a given vintage, rather than trying to select the fruit to fit his needs as a winemaker. As he points out, “the alcohol of the 1998 Château La Conseillante, that we had a few nights ago, was 14.3 percent,” but the higher octane presented “no problem at all, as the acid and fruit were in balance” and the wine was seamless. He continues, “when the pH goes up too high, it is the alcohol, and not the flavor profile of the wine which dominates and pushes the wine into sweetness,” and the alcohol is likely to add “to the imbalance and you get a really

liqueur-like wine” that is not necessarily predisposed to harmonious aging in the bottle. Chris’ approach to new wood has also evolved over the years a bit, as he observes that “I made slightly more oak-driven wines for a couple of vintages in the early to mid-1990s, but quickly reverted back to my customary levels,” though when he says that the wines were a bit oakier in style, this meant forty to fifty percent new wood, rather than the customary twenty-five to thirty-five percent, so the percentage of new oak has never been a huge factor in the Andrew Will wines at any stage in the winery’s history. But, as Chris likes to joke, “speaking of oak, in 1994 and 1995 I was using much more new wood, but went to treatment and was able to kick it!”

As Chris Camarda has stated in the past, here in Washington “we can grow merlot and cabernet franc on the whole better than in California,” and this gives our blends a “stereophonic, rather than a monophonic” quality- “that’s our strength.” Like so many of the great winegrowers around the world, Chris fully believes that great wine is the product of great vineyards and cannot be made in the cellars. He has frequently been quoted as saying that one can make a mediocre wine from a great vineyard through sloppy winemaking, but it is simply impossible to make a great wine from a mediocre vineyard- no matter how much winemaking talent one might have. So, it is not surprising that over the course of his career, he has moved more and more in the direction of defining his wines from the vineyards in which they originate, rather than by the varietals that comprise their compositions. By the 1998 vintage, all of Andrew Will’s main wines were single vineyard wines- though still labeled by varietal- and by the 2001 vintage this idea had grown into producing solely vineyard designated blends (with the exception of the Columbia Valley bottlings of wines that did not fit into the final blends of each vineyard), and this has been the heart and soul of Andrew Will Cellars’ lineup since the start of the new millennium. Back in the earlier days, when all of the Andrew Will wines were still varietally labeled, Chris would make reserve wines on an infrequent basis, which were culled from his favorite barrels in the cellar. Rather than label these wines as “Reserve”, he simply would denote these bottlings by a red “R” at the bottom of the front label, for as he recalls, “I did not want to use the word Reserve, as this is a term that has almost no meaning in this country, but I wanted to denote something on the label- these were just my favorite barrels in a given vintage.” Not surprisingly, most of these barrels would have originated with fruit from either the Ciel du Cheval or Champoux vintages. He produced his “R” bottlings from 1989 until 1997.

As a strong proponent of vineyard excellence and *terroir*, it is not surprising that Chris Camarda has moved over the years to invest in vineyards, rather than being content to rely solely on purchased fruit. He is now one of several partners in the Champoux Vineyard in Horse Heaven Hills, and in 2000, along with his partners Bill and Melody Fleckenstein, he planted the Two Blondes Vineyard in western Yakima. Champoux Vineyard has been a joint venture for many years, and amongst the partners here are other top Washington state wineries that also own a piece of the vineyard, including Quilceda Creek and Woodward Canyon. The Champoux Vineyard was actually the source for Chris’ first “vineyard designated bottling”, which hailed from the 2000 vintage, and by 2001, this was joined by a Bordeaux blend from Ciel du Cheval Vineyard as well. In 2003, as the fruit from Two Blondes Vineyard was coming on line, it was added to the vineyard designate lineup, and along with Sorella, this has been the heart and soul of the Andrew Will portfolio ever since. There have been other bottlings during the years since the estate moved to vineyard designates, which include the estate’s syrah bottling (which I hope to have the pleasure to taste one of these days), a single vineyard merlot bottling from the

Klipsun Vineyard for a handful of vintages and the aforementioned cabernet sauvignon from the Discovery Vineyard, which first joined the Andrew Will lineup in the 2007 vintage.

I asked Chris about how the Andrew Will lineup eventually evolved in the direction of today's three Bordeaux-styled blends, to go along with the Discovery Vineyard cabernet sauvignon, and he noted that "I have always loved the wines of Bordeaux, since my early days in the restaurant business, as well as California cabernets from the decade of the 1980s," so it was logical that these would be the wines that he would produce at Andrew Will Cellars. This affinity for Bordeaux-styled wines was very much in evidence as I tasted through the superb lineup of maturing bottles that Chris Camarda and the team at Andrew Will generously sent me this spring, after I had responded in the affirmative to a quick email that "Chris wanted to send a few older bottles" if I would be interested in seeing how the wines evolved with bottle age. I have long been familiar with the wines from Andrew Will, as back in my sommelier days at Gotham Bar and Grill in the early 1990s, I had inherited a lovely selection of these wines in the cellar there from my predecessor. Little did I know then that these were the very earliest vintages that Chris had crafted at Andrew Will, and if I had been a bit more savvy back then, I would have put some of those wines in my own cellar to follow their evolutions in bottle. So it was quite nostalgic for me to go back to some of these wines from the mid-1990s and revisit what I could now be drinking out of my own cellar if I had been a bit more foresighted back in the day. In the notes that follow, I have not included any of the more recent releases that I have reviewed in the annual "Old School American Wine" features, but these notes can easily be pulled up from the database for those who are curious. Here, I have focused on the "few older bottles" that the team at Andrew Will sent my way this spring. Given that the wines here throw plenty of sediment, I took the arrivals here in the spring and stood them up in my cellar, so that they could settle back from their trans-continental voyage, and only tackled them in the latter half of the month of October. I strongly recommend decanting all of Chris' wines once they have a few years of bottle age. As the notes below will attest, Andrew Will Cellars is one of the great producers of classically-styled American wines, and as they remain a bit below the radar, they offer up truly stunning values for the cellar. I can recommend these wines highly enough, as they age brilliantly!

Ciel du Cheval Vineyard (Red Mountain)

The Ciel du Cheval Vineyard on Red Mountain has been one of the backbones of the winery's lineup since day one, with the first Andrew Will Cellars single vineyard bottling of merlot hailing from grapes from this parcel in 1989. The single varietal bottlings from this vineyard that appeared prior to 2001 were all made from one hundred percent of each grape variety, rather than blends. Since 2001, the wine has been a vineyard-designated blend that tends to have a bit more merlot and cabernet franc in the cépages, with smaller percentages of cabernet sauvignon and petit verdot, but of course, this also depends on how each grape variety fares in any given vintage. Ciel du Cheval Vineyard is owned by Jim Holmes, who planted it in 1975. The area under vine now in Ciel du Cheval is roughly forty hectares, with the soil here a highly calcareous loam over a bed of gravel. The gravel is great for the classic Bordeaux varietals planted here and the high degree of limestone does a nice job of reigning in the vigor of the vines, so that the berries produced here are routinely small and give quite concentrated juice. It is the warmest of the four vineyards that Andrew Will uses as a source for its grapes. Chris Camarda began buying fruit from here in his first commercial vintage of 1989, and it was

his single vineyard Merlot bottling from Ciel du Cheval that first gained Andrew Will Cellars a wider audience of wine lovers. These days, the Ciel du Cheval bottling tends to have the highest percentage of merlot and cabernet franc of the three single vineyard blends, so this is where the Cheval Blanc similarities are often the most striking between Chris' wines and that well-known property in St. Émilion.

2005 Ciel du Cheval Vineyard- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2005 Ciel du Cheval bottling is one of the riper years for this bottling from Chris Camarda, as the wine came in at 14.5 percent alcohol in this vintage, and it does still show just a bit of backend heat on the palate. The blend this year was forty percent each of merlot and cabernet franc, fourteen percent cabernet sauvignon and six percent petit verdot. The bouquet on the '05 is really quite vibrant and impressive, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of sweet cassis, black cherries, dark soil tones, cigar smoke, a touch of lead pencil and a deft base of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite pure on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins, blossoming complexity and a very long finish that has a bit of alcohol poking out on the otherwise refined and beautifully focused finish. The heat here is not obtrusive, but I wonder if a bit of developmental complexity has been sacrificed here to the ripeness. It could still do with four or five more years of bottle age to really let the tannins fully fall away and the secondary layers to completely blossom. There are not a whole lot of 14.5 percent alcohol wines (outside of Barolo) that I can happily drink, but this is clearly one of them! 2018-2038. 91+.

2004 Ciel du Cheval Vineyard- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2004 Ciel du Cheval bottling has a bit more merlot in its blend than the '05, as the *cépages* for this wine in '04 is forty-eight percent merlot, thirty percent cabernet franc, fifteen percent cabernet sauvignon and seven percent petit verdot. This too is a pretty ripe vintage of this bottling, coming in at 14.6 percent. The nose is rounder and riper than on the 2005, offering up scents of black cherries, chocolate, some balsamic tones, just a touch of cedary oak and damp, dark soil. On the palate the wine is plush, complex and nicely creamy on the attack, with a good core, modest tannins and a bit more heat poking out on the backend than on the 2005 version. There are really some lovely elements here, but it is probably just a bit too ripe for its own good and will be better off drunk up sooner, rather than hoping the structural elements will remain as nicely integrated over the long haul as they are today. With extended aeration, this seems to develop threatening signs of oxidation on the horizon, so I would definitely advise drinking this up over the near term. An okay wine, but one of my least favorite examples from Chris Camarda. 2013-2018. 87.

2003 Ciel du Cheval Vineyard- Andrew Will Cellars

The blend on the 2003 Ciel du Cheval is more along the lines of the 2005, with a bit less merlot and a bit more cabernet franc in the *cépages*. For the record, this is comprised of forty-two percent merlot, thirty-six percent cabernet franc, sixteen percent cabernet sauvignon and six percent petit verdot. This too is 14.5 percent alcohol, but the higher percentage of cabernet franc in the mix gives off the impression of a cooler and more black fruity wine on the nose, as it wafts from the glass in a complex and very classy aromatic constellation of sweet, dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, espresso, dark soil tones, a touch of currant leaf and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, impressive complexity, modest tannins and a very long, tangy and ever so slightly warm finish. This carries its ripeness beautifully and is another 14.5 percent wine that I could drink anytime (this is getting alarming!) or anywhere. I

would have liked it even better at fourteen percent or less, but this wine is very well-balanced at its octane level and at least for drinking over the next decade, this is outstanding juice. 2013-2023+? 93+.

2002 Ciel du Cheval Vineyard- Andrew Will Cellars

The *cépages* of the 2002 Ciel du Cheval is bit different from others in this series, as it includes eighteen percent cabernet sauvignon and ten percent petit verdot (to go along with forty-four percent merlot and twenty-eight percent cabernet franc), and though it is only a touch lower in octane than the 2003 (14.4 versus 14.5 percent alcohol), the overall profile of the wine is cooler and more black fruity as a result of the higher percentages of cabernet sauvignon and petit verdot. I love the nose on this wine, which offers up a deep and complex mélange of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, a touch of French roast, dark soil tones, a hint of menthol, balsam boughs and a lovely framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced on the attack, with great focus and core, still a fair bit of chewy tannin and outstanding length and grip on the ripe, but relatively cool finish. This is aging beautifully, but I would be tempted to still give it another four or five years to let its more substantial tannins mellow out a little bit more- though, with a steak on the grill, I would have absolutely no problems drinking this wine tonight! But, its best days are still to come. 2018-2035+. 93.

2001 Ciel du Cheval Vineyard- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2001 Ciel du Cheval was the first from Chris Camarda that did not include a varietal label, and this vintage includes the highest percentage of merlot (sixty percent) of the series from 2001 to 2005. The remainder of the *cépages* is twenty-one percent cabernet franc, twelve percent cabernet sauvignon and seven percent petit verdot, and this is a tad lower in octane at 14.4 percent than the 2005 or 2004 versions. At age twelve, the wine is really drinking beautifully, with its merlot component shaping its lovely aromatic personality of sweet dark berries, cigar ash, a touch of currant leaf, dark soil tones, balsam boughs, an exotic touch of *pain épice* and a judicious framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very elegant, with impeccable focus and balance, a fine core, moderate tannins and excellent complexity on the long, still moderately chewy and very refined finish. There is not quite the same mid-palate stuffing as the wines with a touch less merlot in the blend, but the wine has superb intensity of flavor and out-finesses those wines. 2015-2035. 94.

Single Varietal Bottlings from the Ciel du Cheval Vineyard

2000 Cabernet Sauvignon “Ciel du Cheval Vineyard”- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2000 Cabernet Sauvignon from the Ciel du Cheval Vineyard is a superb wine that is just how starting to really blossom and is drinking very well indeed. This is quite a bit lower in octane than the blended bottlings from this vineyard from 2001 forwards, as it comes in at an even thirteen percent alcohol, and I love the “cool” fruit tone that it shows on both the nose and palate. As 2000 was one of the coolest vintages of the decade, it is not surprising that this wine has such a svelte personality. The very classy bouquet is fine blend of cassis, black cherries, espresso, cigarette ash, dark soil tones and a touch of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, still a fair bit of tannin, good acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and well-balanced finish. This is a fine drink today, but my gut instincts tell me that it will be even better with another five years of aging. A superb bottle. 2013-2035+. 93+.



The Ciel du Cheval Vineyard on Red Mountain.

1999 Merlot “Ciel du Cheval Vineyard”- Andrew Will Cellars

The 1999 Ciel du Cheval Merlot is a beautiful bottle of wine that is into its elegant apogee of peak drinkability. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined and quite complex blend of dark berries, plums, chocolate, a bit of meatiness, tobacco leaf, beautiful soil tones, cigar ash and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with modest tannins, a fine core, lovely focus and balance, good acidity and outstanding length and grip on the really nicely structured finish. This is not a voluptuous, blowsy example of merlot, but rather a wine of superb poise and a tightly-knit structure. It should continue to drink beautifully for several decades. 2013-2030+. 93+.

1998 Cabernet Sauvignon “Ciel du Cheval Vineyard”- Andrew Will Cellars

I really like the smoky and soil-driven personality of the 1998 Ciel du Cheval Cabernet from Chris Camarda, which is beautifully complex and well-balanced at age fifteen and just starting to approach its apogee. Interestingly, this makes a very good bookend with the 2000 cabernet from this vineyard, as the '98 is from a very warm vintage, while the 2000 is from a cool year, and yet both wines show outstanding soil signature now that they are reaching their apogees. The 1998 cabernet still shows some backend structure on the palate, but the bouquet is absolutely singing in its very bright mélange of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, espresso, a bit of tobacco leaf and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, superb focus and spine, moderate tannins and a very long, tangy and intensely flavored finish. This is relatively low octane at thirteen percent, and I am sure this wine was plenty tight in its youth, but the wine is aging brilliantly and to my mind it is far more interesting to have a wine like this that needs some extended bottle age to unlock all of

its mysteries, rather than a riper wine that offers up more flesh on the bone out of the blocks, but cannot evolve into a wine of this much complexity and vibrant intensity. As tasty as this wine is today at age fifteen, it is really still a baby and the best is yet to come. Stellar wine! 2015-2035+. 94.

1997 Merlot “Ciel du Cheval Vineyard”- Andrew Will Cellars

The 1997 Merlot from the Ciel du Cheval Vineyard is a lovely wine that comes in at thirteen percent alcohol and shows off wonderful complexity and breed on both the nose and palate. The deep and *à point* bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, plums, cigar ash, a bit of roasted meat, coffee, herb tones and a fine base of soil. This is the most Pomerol-like in terms of aromatics of any of this range of Ciel du Cheval merlots. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and velvety on the attack, with very solid mid-palate, melted tannins, good acids and very nice length and grip on the mature and classy finish. This has been at its peak for several years already, but though it is getting a bit more delicate in style, it still has good structural integrity and shows no signs of beginning to fade any time soon. Good juice. 2013-2023+? 91.

1996 Merlot “Ciel du Cheval Vineyard”- Andrew Will Cellars

The 1996 Merlot from the Ciel du Cheval Vineyard is quite a bit different stylistically than the 1999 or 1997, with a bit more of a red fruity personality and just a touch of volatile acidity (that blows off with decanting). The bouquet is deep, complex and a bit more advanced than the 1997, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries and dark berries, grilled venison, forest floor, coffee, cigar ash, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and nicely tertiary, with very solid depth at the core, just a trace of backend tannin still remaining, tangy acids and very good length and grip on the focused and very complex finish. I love the intensity of flavor here without undue weight. This is really a very classy bottle of fully mature merlot. 2013-2025. 93.

Champoux Vineyard (Horse Heaven Hills)

Champoux Vineyards in the Horse Heaven Hills is a joint venture that is managed by investor, Paul Champoux, who is the vineyard manager, as well as the managing partner of the venture. It has been one of the prime sources for grapes for Andrew Will wines since the very earliest days of the winery, and it is also the home of the old cabernet sauvignon vines that make up the majority of the blend in the winery’s Sorella bottling. This is a large vineyard of roughly seventy-one hectares, with the first vines planted here in 1972 (these earliest planted vines provide the cabernet sauvignon grapes that are earmarked for the Sorella bottling each year), lying at an altitude of six hundred to seven hundred feet above sea level and located about five miles inland from the Columbia River. However, the river does have its effect on the microclimate at Champoux Vineyard, as the wind that blows through the Columbia River Gorge races incessantly across this vineyard landscape, so that, as Chris Camarda likes to say, “it seems that the wind is always blowing here.” The soils here are sandy loam, and the vineyard’s fruit is characterized by quite suave and silky tannins. Typically, this bottling tended to be a bit more reliant on cabernet sauvignon (which of course, are the oldest vines planted here) than some of the other single vineyard Andrew Will cuvées, but over the years, the percentage of cabernet sauvignon in the blend has dropped down into the forty percent range in recent times, in comparison to over sixty percent in the earliest years of this wine as a single vineyard bottling in the first years of the new millennium. As Chris Camarda observes, the Sorella bottling is a bit more cabernet-driven, so the blend on the vineyard-designate from Champoux has seen the percentage of cabernet franc and merlot rise a bit “to help differentiate a bit between the two

bottlings from the Champoux vineyard.” In comparison to the Ciel du Cheval bottling, the Champoux seems to me to take a year or two longer to start to mature, and is quite often the most black fruity of the Andrew Will single vineyard bottlings. The 2000 vintage of Champoux was the first vineyard-designated blend from Andrew Will Cellars, with the Ciel du Cheval bottling following from the 2001 vintage.

2005 Champoux Vineyard- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2005 Champoux Vineyard bottling is aging very nicely and is really starting to get fairly close to full bloom at age eight. The wine is comprised of a blend of forty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty percent merlot, twenty percent cabernet franc and five percent petit verdot and came in at an octane of 14.2 percent. The wine offers up a really lovely bouquet of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash, coffee grounds, a touch of chicory, currant leaf and a suave base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and elegant on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, lovely complexity, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This is still a few years away from primetime drinking, but it is aging very gracefully and should really be a fine drink in another three or four years. 2016-2035. **92.**

2004 Champoux Vineyard- Andrew Will Cellars

The *cépages* for the 2004 Champoux Vineyard bottling is a bit different from the '05, with the blend forty-four percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-five percent cabernet franc, twenty-two percent merlot and nine percent petit verdot. The wine came in at 14.3 percent alcohol and offers up a very fine aromatic constellation of dark berries, cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, coffee bean. Tobacco leaf and cedar. The aromatics strike me as very Graves-like right now. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant, with a more youthful profile than the 2005, firm ripe tannins, outstanding focus and balance, blossoming complexity and excellent length and grip on the still fairly chewy finish. I really like the precision and brightness here, but this wine will need a bit more cellaring before it is ready for primetime drinking. This has a “cooler vintage” personality that I really like and I am sure this is going to be a dynamite glass of wine in the fullness of time. 2020-2045+. **93.**

2003 Champoux Vineyard- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2003 Champoux from Chris Camarda has one of the highest percentages of cabernet sauvignon in its blend of any of the range of vintages I tasted of this bottling, with fully fifty-nine percent of the *cépages* cabernet sauvignon, with the remainder a mix of twenty-one percent cabernet franc, fifteen percent merlot and five percent petit verdot. The wine is really lovely and starting to enter its apogee, as it offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, charred wood, cigar smoke, tobacco leaf and a deft framing of cedary, spicy wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and smoky, with a superb core, really lovely vibrancy, fine-grained, receding tannins, good acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and very classy finish. Give this lovely wine another five or six years to fully soften and develop more secondary layers of complexity- it is going to be well worth the wait! 2018-2045. **93.**

2002 Champoux Vineyard- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2002 Champoux Vineyard bottling is the most cabernet sauvignon-dominated of the wines I tasted for this article, coming in at sixty-four percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-one percent merlot, eleven percent petit verdot and four percent cabernet franc. The wine is still on the young side, wafting from the glass in a pure and still fairly primary aromatic blend of cassis, dark berries, tobacco leaf, bitter chocolate, a touch of violet and cedary, spicy wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with an excellent core of fruit, firm,

well-integrated tannins, good acids and a very long, focused and still fairly chewy finish. This too, will need at least another five or six years in the cellar to really come around, but it will be excellent in the fullness of time. 2019-2045+. **92+**.

2000 Champoux Vineyard- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2000 Champoux Vineyard bottling is a lovely wine that is just starting to really come into its own, but I imagine that it was pretty tight and bound up in its structural elements when young. The wine is comprised of fifty-two percent cabernet sauvignon, as well as twenty-eight percent cabernet franc and twenty percent merlot. At age thirteen, the wine is now just moving close to its apogee of maturity, but will cruise along at this lovely level for decades to come and will be even better with a few more years' worth of bottle age. The bouquet is a deep and complex blend of dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a bit of coffee grounds, incipient notes of chipotle pepper, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, still a touch of backend tannins, excellent focus and impressive length and grip on the classy finish. Chris Camarda classified the 2000 vintage as the finest in Washington since his inaugural vintage of 1989, and it is pretty clear to see that his assessment of the vintage was spot on. A very, very classy wine. 2015-2035+. **92**.

Two Blondes Vineyard (Yakima Valley)

This vineyard in western Yakima takes its name from Chris' late wife, Annie Camarda, a tall, striking woman with blond hair, and their partner in the vineyard, Bill Fleckenstein's wife, Melody, who is also blond. The vineyard is located in Zillah, Washington. It is a very complex terroir, with plenty of gravel to be found in its loam and is perched at roughly 1150 feet above sea level and in one of the driest corners of Washington state. As Chris notes, "this is the coolest vineyard site of the four vineyards that we work with." The vines were planted in this thirty acre site in 2000 and the first Andrew Will release from Two Blondes was in the 2003 vintage. The vineyard is planted to cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc and malbec. While this is still very young vines, it is pretty clear from the first fistful of vintages that the quality of this terroir is exceptional and this is likely, once the vines are a bit older, to be one of the very top bottlings from Chris Camarda. The wine has typically been treated just a touch differently in the cellar than the other bottlings, as it has been raised in thirty-five percent new oak since the get-go and all of the new barrels for Two Blondes have been of Taransaud origin. On a couple of the vintages, I have found a bit of the Taransaud "pain épice" tones hovering gently in the background, which makes me wonder if there is a slightly different toast level for the new barrels earmarked for this bottling.

2009 Two Blondes Vineyard- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2009 version of Two Blondes Vineyard from Chris Camarda is really a lovely wine and one that wears its Cheval Blanc similarities on its sleeve. The wine is comprised of a blend of thirty-eight percent cabernet sauvignon and thirty-one percent each cabernet franc and merlot, and despite coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol, the wine shows absolutely no signs of *sur maturité* or little or no heat on the backend. The really lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, menthol, cigar wrapper, a touch of mocha, lovely soil tones and a discreet base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very refined on the attack, with excellent mid-palate depth, quite moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex and very elegant finish. I really like this wine, which seems to have

perfectly snapped into focus on the backend since the last time that I tasted it in the spring and it is quite clear that I underestimated this wine a bit back then. Fine juice. 2015-2035. **93.**

2008 Two Blondes Vineyard- Andrew Will Cellars

I noted when looking back on my previous reviews of Chris Camarda's wines that I had never posted a note on the 2008 Two Blondes Vineyard bottling, but I cannot imagine that Chris did not send me a bottle of the wine and somehow I managed to misplace the note. The blend on the '08 is a bit different than the '09, as this vintage is comprised of thirty percent cabernet sauvignon, forty-two percent merlot, nineteen percent cabernet franc and nine percent malbec. The wine is also 14.5 percent alcohol, but presents a very different aromatic and flavor profile to the 2009, as this is a much more black fruity wine (perhaps from the addition of the malbec in the blend, as well as the higher percentage of merlot this year?) on the nose, offering up scents of sweet cassis, blackberries, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, a touch of tariness and a deft framing of modestly spicy oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and complex, with a very black fruity personality, very good, but not great depth at the core, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. It is only on the backend that the wine's 14.5 percent ripeness level shows, as everywhere else, this wine has the "cool vintage" profile of a black fruity wine of a lower octane. This is not as seductive out of the blocks as the really lovely 2009, but I really like its constituent components and suspect this will be really a beautiful bottle with a few more years bottle age. 2017-2035. **90+.**

2007 Two Blondes Vineyard- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2007 Two Blondes Vineyard bottling from Andrew Will Cellars is really a lovely wine that is now a bit shut down on both the nose and palate, as it appears to be taking a bit of hibernation in at the moment. The bouquet is nascently complex, offering up scents of dark berries, black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, tobacco leaf, espresso and a nice framing of cedary wood that shows just a bit of Taransaud spice as well. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely balanced, with a good core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. Today, there is just a whisper of backend heat here (despite this being a touch lower in octane than either the 2009 or 2008 versions at 14.4 percent), but my gut instinct is that this is simply a phase the wine is going through and once the palate more fully opens up again, this impression will vanish. The elegance that I believe will come to define the Two Blondes Vineyard when the vines are older is very much in evidence in the 2007 version. Good juice, but I would tuck it away in the cellar for a few more years now. 2017-2033+. **92.**

2006 Two Blondes Vineyard- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2006 Two Blondes bottling from Chris Camarda is quite different in its blend than other vintages from this vineyard, as this vintage is very heavily reliant on cabernet franc (forty-three percent), with merlot (twenty-nine percent) and cabernet sauvignon (twenty-eight percent) playing supporting roles in this vintage. The wine is a touch lower in octane at 14.2 percent than several of its brethren. The bouquet is really complex (particularly for a wine from six year-old vines!), wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, dark berries, tobacco leaf, cigar ash, a lovely base of soil, espresso, a touch of leather and a deft touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very elegant, with a good core, beautiful focus and balance, moderate tannins and outstanding length and grip on the complex and very refined finish. I love the tobacco leaf component that the higher percentage of cabernet franc brings to this wine. This is really a terrific bottle that is already drinking well, but will be even better with a few more years in the cellar to allow the tannins to more fully fall away. 2015-2035. **93+.**

2004 Two Blondes Vineyard- Andrew Will Cellars

The second vintage from Two Blondes has aged very well indeed and is now drinking at its peak. The blend is again fairly dominated by cabernet franc, with forty-four percent of the *cépages* from that grape, with twenty-one percent merlot and thirty-five percent cabernet sauvignon rounding out the mix. The wine comes in at 14.2 percent alcohol and offers up a lovely, maturing nose of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a bit of chicory and a gentle base of new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a good core, a very elegant personality, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the gently chewy finish. The young vine nature of this wine are most keenly noticed in the relatively modest level of complexity in comparison to some of the subsequent vintages, but the wine has a great sense of balance and is really enjoyable to drink. 2013-2030+. **90.**

Sorella

Sorella is a Bordeaux-styled blend produced by Chris Camarda since the 1994 vintage, which finds its heart and soul in the oldest vines planted in the Champoux Vineyard in Horse Heaven Hills. The wine takes its name from the Italian term for sister, and since the 2005 vintage, the painting on the label has been of Chris Camarda's wife, Annie Camarda, who tragically passed away in that year. The wine is primarily based on cabernet sauvignon, from the block of oldest vines in the Champoux vineyard. This parcel was planted in 1972. The old vines of cabernet sauvignon from Champoux were typically augmented with cabernet sauvignon from Ciel du Cheval as well, with the merlot used in this bottling hailing from either Ciel du Cheval, Klipsun or Pepper Bridge "Girl" Vineyards- varying on the year and how each respective vineyard performed with their merlot crop. Sorella was the first blend that Chris Camarda produced and this was the precursor that led to the eventual switch to primarily producing Bordeaux-styled blends for the Andrew Will lineup. Cabernet franc and petit verdot for this bottling have typically come from the Ciel du Cheval Vineyard as well. The Andrew Will Sorella is typically raised in thirty-five to forty percent new wood in any given vintage, with only Taransaud barrels used for this wine. Chris likes to consider it his finest bottling, and as the notes below will attest, it is pretty hard not to agree with him, as this is consistently a superb wine.

2005 Sorella- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2005 Sorella from Chris Camarda is a lovely wine that is comprised of a blend of sixty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, seventeen percent cabernet franc, twelve percent merlot and seven percent petit verdot. The wine comes in at 14.4 percent alcohol, but shows absolutely no signs of heat on either the nose and the palate and is aging very gracefully. The superb bouquet is a complex blend of cassis, black cherries, Cuban cigars, a touch of menthol, lovely soil tones, incipient smokiness and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and just beginning to show some secondary layers of complexity, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe, well-measured tannins and outstanding length and grip on the blossoming, but still fairly young finish. At age eight, the 2005 Sorella is still a tad too young for primetime drinking, but it is on the cusp of a full and very rewarding blossoming and only a few more years of patience will be necessary. It is a stellar wine. 2016-2040. **94.**

2004 Sorella- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2004 Sorella is composed of a blend of fifty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-one percent merlot, eighteen percent cabernet franc and six percent petit verdot and was

raised in one-third new barrels. The 2004 comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol, and it is aging very well, but there is still just a trace of backend heat poking out uncovered on the very long finish. The bouquet is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex and very classy mélange of dark berries, cassis, coffee bean, dark soil tones, cigar smoke, a nice touch of St. Émilien-like nutskin and a deft framing of smoky new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and focused on the attack, with a superb core, moderate tannins and a very long, complex and classy finish that still shows just a whisper of alcohol on the backend. I have little doubt that this wine will age seamlessly, but it is a touch riper on the finish than the perfectly poised 2005 version. 2017-2040. **91+**.

2003 Sorella- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2003 vintage of Sorella is pretty ripe, at 14.6 percent alcohol, and the wine is a bit dark and deep-pitched as a result. With a bit of time in the glass, the wine brightens up a bit aromatically, but this is a touch heavier in style than most vintages of Sorella. The nose is a blend of cassis, coffee grounds, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of meatiness, menthol and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and black fruity, with a good core and no shortage of elegance on the attack, modest tannins and a bit of backend heat poking out on the long finish. I like this wine very well, but it does not have the purity and complexity of the less ripe vintages of Sorella. The blend in this vintage, by the way, was fifty percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-three percent merlot, seventeen percent cabernet franc and ten percent petit verdot. 2015-2030+. **88**.

2002 Sorella- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2002 Sorella from Chris Camarda is one of my favorite vintages of this outstanding bottling. The wine's *cépages* is a mix of forty-seven percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-six percent merlot, nineteen percent cab franc and eight percent petit verdot, with the octane in this vintage 14.5 percent. The bouquet is simply beautiful, wafting from the glass in a complex mix of dark berries, cassis, Cuban cigars, espresso, lovely soil tones, cedary wood, tobacco ash and a touch of both fresh rosemary and lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a fine core, excellent focus, ripe tannins and a long, fairly ripe, but very well-balanced finish. This is still a young wine, but another five to six years will really see the wine reach its apogee and start to sing in earnest. Fine juice! 2018-2040. **93+**.

2001 Sorella- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2001 vintage of Sorella from Andrew Will Cellars has just a bit more cabernet sauvignon in its blend than most vintages (sixty-eight percent), to go along with ten percent merlot, fifteen percent cabernet franc and seven percent petit verdot. All of the cabernet in this vintage comes from the parcel of the oldest vines in the Champoux Vineyard. The wine offers up a superb nose of cassis, sweet dark berries, cigar smoke, a touch of chicory, a fine base of soil, incipient notes of balsam bough and a very suave base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a fine core, ripe tannins, lovely focus and complexity on the very long finish. This is quite ripe on the backend, and while the alcohol is perfectly contained, there is still a suggestion of heat hovering over the long finish. I have no issue with the wine's balance, but it seems to me that even more purity and precision is found in this wine when it comes in just under the 14.5 percent of the 2001 vintage. 2018-2035+. **91**.

2000 Sorella- Andrew Will Cellars

The 2000 Sorella is from a cooler year in Washington state, but one that produced long hang time and fine ripeness. The Sorella this year came in at an even thirteen percent alcohol and is a blend of seventy percent cabernet sauvignon, fifteen percent merlot, twelve percent cabernet

franc and three percent petit verdot, with all the grapes but the petit verdot hailing from the Champoux Vineyard. As much as I like the riper renditions of Sorella, there is an aromatic precision and a vibrancy to the 2000 Sorella that simply cannot be matched at higher octane levels. The bouquet is superb, offering up notes of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, espresso, dark soil tones, a touch of fresh herbs and a lovely framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nicely structured, with a rock solid core, excellent focus and grip, still a fair bit of tannin and a very long, complex and tangy finish. There are “cooler” vintage tones here and the wine still needs a bit more aging as a result, but this is evolving brilliantly and will be a stunning wine for a very long time. Classy juice. 2017-2045+. **93+**.

1999 Sorella- Andrew Will Cellars

Chris Camarda’s 1999 Sorella, which also tips the scales at a cool thirteen percent, is a really lovely wine that is far more ready to drink than the 2000 and offers up lovely complexity on both the nose and palate. I do not have the breakdown of the varietal composition of the wine in percentage terms for this year (which is the same as the 1998), but the cabernet sauvignon here came from the Ciel du Cheval and Champoux Vineyards, the cabernet franc from Ciel du Cheval also and the merlot from the Klipsun and Ciel du Cheval Vineyards. The bouquet is simply lovely, wafting from the glass in a complex and *à point* constellation of black cherries, dark berries, Cuban cigars, coffee, a touch of dried eucalyptus, soil and the faintest memory of nutty oak one has ever seen. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with fine mid-palate depth, just a touch of remaining tannin, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, complex and refined finish. This is very serious juice! 2013-2035. **93**.

1998 Sorella- Andrew Will Cellars

The 1998 vintage was a bit warmer in Washington and the Sorella this year has acquired quite an extroverted personality as a result- while still maintaining all of the breed and structure of a thirteen percent alcohol wine. The blend in 1998 was very similar to the 1999, with the grapes hailing from the same vineyards and the percentages quite close to ’99, but Chris Camarda noted that “at the outset, we worried that the wines would never develop any body, but I love them now.” This is a fully mature vintage of Sorella that is now at its peak, soaring from the glass in a complex mélange of cherries, plums, Cuban cigars, a touch of nutskin, lovely soil tones, a hint of framing new wood and a smoky overtones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully focused, with a fine core of pure fruit, lovely soil inflection, modest remaining tannins and outstanding length and grip on the complex and beautifully balanced finish. While the 1998 Sorella is fully into its apogee of peak drinkability, it still has decades of life ahead of it and will still soften with further bottle age. A superb wine by any measure! 2013-2035. **94**.

1997 Sorella- Andrew Will Cellars

Chris Camarda’s 1997 Sorella is another absolute classic in the making, but at age sixteen, it remains still a few years away from primetime drinking. Chris Camarda rates this as a “great year for Sorella” with the wine a blend of merlot from the Klipsun and Pepper Bridge “Girl” Vineyards and all of the cabernet sauvignon this year hailing from the Champoux Vineyard. The wine offers up a fine and nascently complex nose of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of tobacco leaf, menthol, fresh herb tones and a discreet touch of lead pencil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with great elegance and inner harmony, moderate tannins and a very long, focused and very refined finish. This is an utterly complete wine of great breed, complexity and elegance. 2015-2040. **94**.



1995 Sorella- Andrew Will Cellars

The second vintage of Sorella at Andrew Will, the 1995, is drinking very well, but does not show quite the same seamless elegance of later renditions of this outstanding bottling. All of the merlot in the blend this year hailed from the Pepper Bridge “Girl” Vineyard and the cabernet sauvignon was equal parts from the Champoux and Ciel du Cheval Vineyards. The complex bouquet is quite black fruity in its blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, a touch of tariness, dark soil tones, espresso and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite black fruity in personality, with a lovely soil signature, fine mid-palate depth, still a bit of tannin and excellent length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. It is pretty hard to argue with the impeccable balance of these Sorella vintages that came in at thirteen percent! A lovely wine. 2013-2035. **92+**.

Klipsun Vineyard Merlot (Red Mountain)

Since 1995, Chris Camarda and Andrew Will Cellars have purchased grapes on again and off again from this Red Mountain vineyard over the years. Up through the 2003 vintage, the winery purchased primarily merlot and cabernet sauvignon from Klipsun, but with the maturing of the plantations at Two Blondes Vineyard, there was no longer any need for the merlot and cabernet sauvignon from this vineyard. However, in 2008, Chris did purchase a bit of sauvignon blanc from Klipsun Vineyard for one of his small white wine projects, but 2003 is essentially the last vintage at Andrew Will Cellars where the fruit from this vineyard played a significant role

here. The vineyard was first planted in 1982. However, there were only a few vintages here where a “single vineyard” Klipsun merlot was produced, as the grapes for this bottling have often gone into varietally-designated blends, rather than being produced on its own by Chris.

1999 Merlot “Klipsun Vineyard”- Andrew Will Cellars

The 1999 Merlot from Klipsun Vineyards is a very nice wine that is nearing its apogee of maturity, but it does not have the same inherent elegance as many of the other vineyard-designated wines from Chris Camarda. The nose offers up a complex blend of black cherries, chocolate, gentle notes of balsam bough, saddle leather and a bit of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core of fruit, still some tannin to soften, good focus and balance and a long, moderately chewy finish that shows just a touch of backend barnyard in its still fairly adolescent phase. This still needs a few more years of bottle age to fully soften and should be a very good drink, but it is a tad on the four-square side compared to the single vineyard bottlings from the usual vineyards Chris works with year in and year out. 2016-2035. **88.**

1998 Merlot “Klipsun Vineyard”- Andrew Will Cellars

The 1998 Klipsun merlot had a leaky cork and was so out of character with the 1999 and 1997 vintages that I tasted alongside of it that I had to come to the conclusion that the wine was not a pristine bottle.

1997 Merlot “Klipsun Vineyard”- Andrew Will Cellars

To my palate, the 1997 Klipsun merlot is the most interesting of the three vintages of this wine that I tasted in preparation for this report, as the wine has a purity and complexity that are not matched in the other two vintages. It is still not as elegant as wines made from fruit from other vineyards, but there is plenty of depth and complexity here. The bouquet is a blend of black cherries, cassis, saddle leather, cigar ash, herb tones and just a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with fine mid-palate intensity, moderate tannins and good focus and grip on the long and youthful finish. This still needs some time to really blossom from behind its structural elements, but it will be a fine bottle if given a bit more bottle age. 2018-2035. **89+.**

Varietally-Labeled Bottlings

Back in the formative days at Andrew Will Cellars, Chris Camarda produced a small amount of reserve wines from his favorite barrels in the cellar, and these would be designated with a red “R” at the bottom of the label, to differentiate them from the regular blended bottlings. These were not necessarily blended wines from different vineyard sources, but usually the cabernet reserves ended up being a combination of barrels from fruit that originated in either the Champoux or Ciel du Cheval vineyards, as inevitably, the best barrels in the cellar would be from one of these two vintages. The merlot “R” bottlings would often be a blend of fruit from the Pepper Bridge “Girl” and Klipsun Vineyards, with about fifteen percent cabernet franc added into the cépages. The only “R” bottlings I have seen have been of either merlot or cabernet sauvignon, but perhaps there were other varietals released under the “R” designation as well back in the old days here at Andrew Will. In general, the “R” bottlings might have a touch more new wood to them than the Chris uses today for his vineyard designates, but the average for the “R” bottlings would never exceed forty percent new oak, and as the notes below will attest, it has always been a very discreet component of the aromatic and flavor profiles of the wines. I also have a note here on a blended cabernet sauvignon from the 1995 vintage that

was not an “R” designated wine, but was sent along by Chris with my wealth of samples to show how the basic wines aged from this era. It was quite lovely as well, as the note below will attest.

1997 Cabernet Sauvignon “R”- Andrew Will Cellars

The 1997 “R” bottling of cabernet sauvignon from Chris Camarda is one of my favorite wines that I tasted from Chris Camarda in preparation for this article- and it is pretty clear from scanning the notes that I really like most of Chris’ wines! The maturing bouquet offers up a fine mélange of cassis, dark berries, espresso, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a touch of tobacco leaf, a touch of lead pencil and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off beautiful mid-palate depth, with excellent focus and complexity, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the poised and very classy finish. I know that Chris was most famous for his merlot bottlings back in this era, but the elegance and refinement on display in this cabernet sauvignon might put me in the “cabernet sauvignon first” camp at Andrew Will! A beautiful bottle of claret-weight cabernet sauvignon. 2013-2035. **93.**

1996 Cabernet Sauvignon “R”- Andrew Will Cellars

The 1996 Cabernet Sauvignon “R” bottling is another really fine, elegant bottle of maturing cab. The deep and complex nose offers up scents of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, still a touch of remaining tobacco leaf, a hint of dried eucalyptus and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, a bit more tannin still to resolve than the 1997 version, excellent focus and superb grip on the very long and moderately chewy finish. The 1996 “R” cabernet is a touch broader-shouldered than the 1997, and is probably not quite as seamlessly refined and complex, but this is another really lovely wine that has many years ahead of it and is offering up outstanding drinking today. 2013-2035. **91+.**

1995 Merlot “R”- Andrew Will Cellars

The 1995 Merlot “R” bottling from Andrew Will Cellars is a wine that is very close to its plateau of peak maturity, but not quite there yet. The bouquet is deep and showing lovely secondary elements in its mélange of black cherries, sweet cassis, new leather, dried violets, cigar ash, a touch of inkiness, dried eucalyptus and a nice note of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite refined on the attack, with a lovely core, excellent focus and balance, melting tannins, good acids and really fine length and grip on the complex and classy finish. The aromatic and flavor profile of this wine remind me quite a bit of some old vintages of the Pomerol, Château Le Gay, but with more elegance than those good old bottles ever dreamed possible. This is a superb bottle- perhaps not quite as complex as the *Bordelais* blends Chris is producing today, but with a great sense of balance and breed nonetheless. 2013-2030. **91.**

1995 Cabernet Sauvignon- Andrew Will Cellars

The regular 1995 bottling of cabernet sauvignon from Chris Camarda is aging very well indeed and is a lovely drink at age eighteen. The bouquet is deep, complex and nicely mature, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of cassis, black cherries, chicory, a bit of cigar ash, currant leaf and a fair bit of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely complex, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, melting tannins, good acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and complex finish. There is not the same transparency or elegance here as is found in the “R” bottlings from this era, but this is a fine bottle that is aging very well indeed and is drinking well today and shows still plenty of life for the future as well. 2013-2030. **90.**

1995 Cabernet Sauvignon “R”- Andrew Will Cellars

The 1995 Cabernet Sauvignon “R” bottling from Andrew Will is another excellent wine, wafting from the glass in a mature and complex blend of cassis, black cherries, a touch of saddle leather, dried eucalyptus, French roast, dark soil tones and a generous framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with lovely focus and resolved flavors, excellent mid-palate concentration, moderate, ripe tannins and a very long, balanced and blossoming finish. This is a bit chewier today than either the 1997 or 1996 “R” cabernets and really needs a bit more time in the cellar to really start hitting on all cylinders, but it is a superb bottle of classy cabernet and should have a long apogee. 2015-2035. **91+**.

1994 Merlot “R”- Andrew Will Cellars

The 1994 Merlot “R” from Andrew Will Cellars is even a small step up from the very, very strong 1995 vintage. The excellent bouquet wafts from the glass in a very refined mix of plums, black cherries, woodsmoke, balsam bough, lovely soil tones, dried eucalyptus, coffee and just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety, with a fine core, melted tannins, great balance and focus, superb grip and a very long, complex and supremely elegant finish. The backend here closes with a touch of the new leather tones found in the 1995 version, but it is a much more discreet element here than in the 1995. Again, this is not quite as complex as Chris’ blended wines, but this is really a beautiful bottle at its apogee of maturity, but still with years of life ahead of it. 2013-2030. **93**.

THE 2012 BEAUJOLAIS VINTAGE AND OTHER RECENTLY TASTED BOTTLES FROM THE REGION



The 2012 vintage in Beaujolais will not be remembered with great fondness by *vignerons* in the region, as these soaring hillside vineyards shared a difficult growing season with several other wine-producing areas of France, and a myriad of climactic depredations severely cut back production in this vintage. Bitter frosts were the first malady to confront producers in the region, as temperatures plummeted for more than two weeks in February of 2012 and many vines were lost or damaged throughout the region during this cold snap. The pain of the frosts may have been mitigated a bit at the time by the lovely quality of the 2011s happily resting, post-fermentation, in cellars during the winter of 2012, but as the season got underway in the spring, things continued to be very challenging in the vines. Budbreak was a bit early, as March was sunny, warm and announced an early (albeit, short-lived) spring. April was cold and wet, with several hail storms hitting the Beaujolais-Villages region on April 19th. As the cool weather continued, the slightly early budbreak of 2012 was quickly given back and flowering was a bit late in this vintage, getting started around the 3rd of June, but with unsettled weather during this period stretching out the *floraison* and causing *millerandage* that would further adversely affect yields with small and poorly-formed bunches. The heart of the summer was not a whole lot friendlier to *vignerons* in the region, with several more hail storms rolling through the Beaujolais *vignobles* on June 2nd and the 11th, with one centered on the village of Beaujeu (with some vineyards losing one hundred percent of the crop!) and the other on Fleurie and Morgon. As if this was not enough, there continued plenty of cloudy weather and rain which further slowed down the ripening of the grapes and posing a huge threat of mildew. As Gregory Barbet of Domaine des Billards in St. Amour observed, “the constant rain favored the development of

mildew and oidium such as I have never seen before.” In fact, rainfall in the months of April, May, June and August were more than double the norm for the region, with only the month of July reasonably dry, so that constant treatments were *de rigueur* for *vignerons* throughout the summer.

As if the growing season had not been challenging enough already, there was more severe hail again on August 1st and 5th in the Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages regions, with the first storm centered around the Pierres Dorées and the second around Le Perréon. Finally, *vignerons* were able to get started with the harvest on the weekend 7th of September, with small bunches of even smaller berries the norm, and with rather uneven ripening. As Xavier Barbet of Domaine des Billards observed, “the maturity of the grapes was very varied- not just from one area to another- but even in individual bunches and rigorous sorting at the time of the harvest has been a vital element for quality.” Overall, production in the entire Beaujolais region was off by more than forty percent from the 2011 vintage, and though the short quantities were somewhat compensated for (after sorting out for uneven ripeness) by pretty good quality, small berries, it is pretty clear that the 2012 vintage is not going to be able to keep pace with the fine trio of 2009, 2010 and the 2011 vintages in Beaujolais.

In general, the style of the best 2012s recalls a bit the style of the 2008s early on- though with the very low yields of 2012, there is perhaps a bit more mid-palate stuffing here than in the earlier vintage, but also more tannins and with some of the wines showing a bit of a dry edge on the backend. This is certainly not a vintage of stunning sugar levels, and there are plenty of 2012 Beaujolais bottlings out there that show an overtly herbal streak from less than ideal ripeness, and for folks who try to steer clear of this characteristic in their wines, a great many of the 2012s will simply not be for them. That said, a great many of these wines do show admirable complexity, nice focus and balance, and good intensity of flavor on the long and quite accessible finishes. What one really senses in the 2012s, in comparison to many recent vintages, is a certain lack of energy and vibrancy to the fruit components of these wines- which is something I often will find in vintages (such as is the case of 2012 in Beaujolais) where hail plays a significant role during the growing season. It is not “hail taint” *per se* that shows up in the wines, but rather a sense of plant fatigue on the part of the vines from having to endure the hail (and then spending a fair bit of subsequent energy reserves focusing on trying to regenerate vegetation, rather than ripening their grapes), and this takes away some of the vivid tones that one is so accustomed to finding in a new vintage of Beaujolais. This is not to say that the top wines of the vintage will not age well over the medium-term- as they clearly will- but, when one is working through a lineup of 2012s in conjunction with wines from several other recent Beaujolais vintages, this slightly “dulled” aspect to the expression of fruit in the 2012 vintage is quite apparent. Quite clearly, the 2012 vintage in Beaujolais is much stronger in the sectors where there was no hail, and more problematic where there was hail, as there is a possibility that many of those wines were made from bunches that just did not get ripe enough.

For this report, which focuses primarily on the 2012 Beaujolais, I have also tried to work in a number of bottles from the 2011 vintage, as I have heard a few reports from tasters that the vintage has turned quite “vegetal” in the last several months and is nowhere near as pleasant today as it was a year ago. As I had buried my 2011s in the cellar, not anticipating to start drinking them still for several years, I did not have any recent experience with the wines to

corroborate or dispel these notions about an alleged vegetal streak now defining the 2011s and sought to taste a range of 2011s along with the 2012s to see how the vintage was faring with a bit of bottle age. Normally, I would only be opening late-released bottles of 2011s for this report, but due to some mild hysteria out there, I figured I should revisit as many 2011s as possible for this article and see what was going on with the wines at the present time. What I found was that the vintage's pretty firm structural chassis is, in many cases, softening at a slightly brisker pace that I expected a year ago, as the firm tannins seem to be very nicely burying themselves in the deep and pure fruit of this vintage and many wines seem likely to offer up earlier pleasure than I envisioned a year ago. That said, the top wines still certainly seem very capable of aging long and gracefully and now seem likely to simply have longer windows of peak drinkability, without sacrificing any longevity on the backend of their plateaus. One of the most striking aspects of tasting so many 2011s and 2012s together is just how vibrant and pure the 2011s are in comparison to the wines from the more difficult year of 2012- there is an energy and sappiness at the core of the '11s that is simply not mirrored in the '12s and which further underscores just how lovely the 2011 vintage has turned out in the Beaujolais region. For what it is worth, whatever "weediness" that this vintage has allegedly developed in the last several months was adamantly not evident in any of the 2011s that I tasted! I have to assume that amateurs out there who were finding the 2011 Beaujolais to be getting quite herbal simply do not have a lot of experience with young Beaujolais beyond super ripe vintages like 2009, or were extrapolating from a few weedy bottles that may have crossed their paths (but not mine) and worrying about a general vintage characteristic of greenness.

Beaujolais Blanc

2012 Beaujolais Blanc- Domaine des Terre Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2012 Beaujolais Blanc from Jean-Paul Brun is sealed up under a plastic cork, which I think is just plain nuts. Why spend a year of your life growing these grapes and making this wine, and then seal it up under a closure that is not likely to last much more than the length of a growing season without coming into jeopardy? I know that price points are important in the market, but the price of agglomerated corks is so close to plastic that it just does not make sense to me to use this imperfect closure these days. In any case, the wine is currently quite nice, offering up a complex nose of apple, peach, almost toasty soil tones, a bit of spring flowers and a touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, juicy and wide open, with a good core, moderate complexity and sneaky length and grip on the fairly low acid finish. This is good juice for early consumption, but let's get this closure changed for the 2013! 2013-2014. **87.**

2012 Beaujolais Blanc- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The struggles of the 2012 vintage are not to be found anywhere in the glass of this stellar Beaujolais Blanc from Monsieur Chermette, which strikes me as one of the finest white wines he has yet produced in his stellar career. The beautiful nose jumps from the glass in a vibrant mix of apple, lemon, chalky soil tones and a potpourri of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and intensely flavored, with crisp acids, excellent focus and grip and a very long, soil-driven and classy finish. I like the cut and structural integrity of the Chermette version of Beaujolais Blanc a bit better than that from Monsieur Brun this year. This is a beautiful bottle of white Burgundy for near-term consumption and a dynamite value! 2013-2018. **90.**

Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages

2012 Beaujolais- Pierre-Marie Chermette

The straight Beaujolais bottling from Pierre-Marie Chermette is usually one of the best values to be found anywhere from this region, and the 2012 is another fine bargain. But, that said, this wine is twelve percent in alcohol and is not particularly sappy, so for folks who are put off by any signs of herbal elements in their wines, this may not be a bottling for you. However, there is as an awful lot of personality and complexity here, and the wine should blossom nicely with another six months of bottle age, and for those who do not mind a touch of herbs in their Beaujolais, there is a lot here to be excited about. The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of red berries, cherries, vinesmoke, fresh herb tones, incipient notes of acorn and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and bouncy, with a good core, a streak of *herbacité* and lovely length and grip on the tangy, focused and slightly peppery finish. I really enjoyed my bottle of this, but I do not have any fear of herbs in my Beaujolais. 2014-2020. **87.**

2012 Beaujolais “Villages”- Damien Coquelet

The 2012 Beaujolais “Villages” from Damien Coquelet shows a bit of the uneven ripening of the vintage on the nose, with some *herbacité* sprinkled in amongst the aromas of cherries, cranberries, woodsmoke, white pepper, acorns and lovely soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and tangy, with a nice dollop of sappiness at the core, moderate ripeness, nice complexity and fine length and grip on the youthful finish. There is not a lot of generosity here today, but the wine is long, and I suspect if one waits a year for this wine, it will be a very interesting drink. But, there is a bit of leanness here that will never go away in my estimation, as this is the nature of the beast in 2012. All in all, a good effort for the vintage and a wine that could be a very pleasant surprise with a bit of bottle age, but if even a trace of greenness in red wine puts you off, this wine will not be for you. 2014-2020. **86+?**

2012 Beaujolais “Les Grandes Coasses”- Paul Durdilly

The 2012 Beaujolais “Les Grandes Coasses” from Paul Durdilly is a very pretty and very complete example of the vintage, with lovely brightness and backend tanginess. The classy nose wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, pomegranate, fresh herbs, violets, a touch of fallen leaves and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and well-balanced, with a touch of *herbacité*, modest tannins, bright acids and fine length and grip on the complex and slightly weedy finish. If one has no tolerance for a bit of herbs on the palate of their wine, then this is not for you, but for those that do not mind this characteristic, there are a lot of good things going on here in the glass. 2013-2019+. **87+.**

2012 Beaujolais- Michel Guignier

Michel Guignier’s 2012 “straight” Beaujolais has turned out very nicely indeed, with a purity and vibrancy on both the nose and palate that was not always easy to realize in this trying vintage. The classic bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a blend of cherries, cranberries, mustard seed, vinesmoke, stony soil tones and a bit of high end spice tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with a nice core, a bit of tannin, vibrant acids and very good length and grip on the low fat and intensely flavored finish. The adequate ripeness of the vintage is evident here in the leaner profile of the wine and the touch of herbs on the nose, but this is clean, bouncy and serious juice. 2013-2020. **88.**

2012 Beaujolais “Cuvée l’Ancien”- Domaine des Terre Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

As always, I really like the depth an inner core that the old vines give to this cuvée, but this is decidedly a 2012 Beaujolais and that means folks will have to deal with a bit of oak leafy

herbacité and a bit of early pepper. The bouquet is certainly bright and complex, offering up scents of cranberries, orange peel, acorns, pepper, lovely soil flavors and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, tight and moderately ripe, with a good core, tangy acids, very little tannin and excellent length and grip on the tight and peppery finish. This is lean and a bit mean right now, but also long and nascently complex, so it will probably be a very interesting glass of wine down the road, but I would not want to touch a bottle for at least a couple of years. Not bad at all, if one can take a bit of *herbacité*. 2015-2023. **86+**.

2012 Beaujolais “Cuvée Traditionnelle- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2012 Cuvée Traditionnelle from Domaine du Vissoux is a very lovely example of the vintage, offering up a complex nose of sweet cranberries, cherries, vinesmoke, marjoram and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and beautifully balanced, with lovely intensity of flavor, just a touch of tannin and fine focus and grip on the long and classy finish. There is a lovely spine of “savory” flavors that run through the core of this wine that I really find attractive. This does not have quite the same mid-palate stuffing or the vibrancy of the 2011 version, but it is a very classy bottle that will not fail to delight. 2013-2020+. **88+**.

2012 Beaujolais “Coeur de Vendanges”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

Monsieur Chermette’s Coeur de Vendanges bottling is a blend of very old vines- over one hundred years of age- from parcels that lie both in Beaujolais AOC and in the Beaujolais-Villages AOC. These old vines have excelled in 2012, as the wine jumps from the glass in a lovely aromatic blend of red and black cherries, a nice touch of meatiness, coffee, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones and a superb signature of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and shows off lovely sappiness at the core, with soft tannins, fine focus and excellent length and grip on the poised and classy finish. A superb example of the 2012 vintage, I would give this wine a couple of years to really blossom. 2015-2025+. **90**.

2011 Beaujolais-Villages- Domaine de Bel Air (Jean-Marc Lafont)

The 2011 Beaujolais-Villages was the first wine that I have tasted from Domaine de Bel Air, and was quite impressed. The bouquet is young and promising, offering up scents of red and black cherries, incipient autumnal tones, dried violets, gentle notes of woodsmoke, incipient notes of acorns and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full and quite tightly-knit still, with a good core, quite tangy acids (particularly for the relatively low acid 2011 vintage), a nice touch of sappiness at the core and a fair bit of backend tannin still to resolve on the long, focused and very serious finish. I would still give this a good year or two in the cellar to fully blossom- it will be a dynamite bottle of Beaujolais-Villages! 2015-2025. **90**.

2011 Beaujolais-Villages- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2011 Beaujolais-Villages from Joseph Drouhin has really blossomed beautifully over the year since I last saw a bottle of this wine and it has to be one of the great bargains out there in the world of wine these days! The pure and sappy nose offers up a fine blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, a touch of cocoa, lovely soil tones, fresh herbs and incipient autumnal notes in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and pure, with a lovely core, just a bit of tannin and lovely grip and backend sappiness on the very long and focused finish. This is really a beautiful bottle of Beaujolais. 2013-2018. **89+**.

2011 Beaujolais- Michel Guignier

The 2011 Beaujolais from Michel Guignier has not lost a step over the course of the year since I last crossed paths with a bottle and the wine is a dynamite example of the vintage and its appellation. The deep and pure nose offers up scents of black cherries, a touch of cassis, fresh

herb tones (mostly thyme), dark soil, woodsmoke and violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core (particularly following on the heels of the very, very good 2012 version!), with a bit of tannin, excellent focus and grip and a very long, pure and deep finish. This is a superb bottle of straight Beaujolais! 2013-2025. **91.**

2011 Beaujolais “Le Perréon”- Domaine de la Madone (Jean Bererd et Fils)

The 2011 Beaujolais “Le Perréon” from Domaine de la Madone is a really plump and succulent example of the vintage. The lovely nose is a blend of black cherries, a touch of chocolate, a touch of fresh nutmeg, dried oak leaves, dark soil tones and a topnote of distant bonfires. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, succulent and nicely balanced, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, soil-driven finish that is already starting to get a bit autumnal. This is a very good drink today, but there is a slightly herbal streak starting to poke out on the backend and which I imagine will get more prominent two or three years down the road, so I would be inclined to drink this over the next few years, while the very pretty fruit of the vintage is still in ascendancy. 2013-2016+. **87.**

Chiroubles

2012 Chiroubles- Daniel Bouland

The 2012 Chiroubles from Daniel Bouland is a fine follow-up to his lovely 2011 version. The elegant and pure nose wafts from the glass in a mélange of cherries, quince, fresh thyme, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil and lovely, early autumnal notes redolent of acorns. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and tangy, with a good core of fruit, a slightly herbal streak running through the middle, modest tannins, bright acids and a long, bouncy finish. Good juice for relatively near-term consumption. 2013-2020. **88+.**

2012 Chiroubles- Damien Coquelet

The 2012 Chiroubles from Damien Coquelet is decidedly riper than his Beaujolais-Villages offering this year and is a really lovely example of the vintage. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of red and black cherries, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, oak leaves and a bit of chicory. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and nicely transparent, with a fine core, a fair bit of tannin and excellent length and grip on the tangy and still youthful finish. This is an excellent bottle, but give it at least six months to blossom. I should note that the wine is a touch reductive, so it really needs at least a few minutes in decanter right now to allow the wine to open up and show all of its potential. A fine, fairly structured 2012 cru. 2014-2024. **90.**

2011 Chiroubles “Vieilles Vignes”- Damien Coquelet

I really like the nose on the 2011 Chiroubles “Vieilles Vignes” from Damien Coquelet, which offers up a juicy mélange of cherries, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, lovely spice tones, a fine base of soil and a nice touch of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and wide open, with very good depth, lovely soil inflection, a bit of backend tannin and a very wide open personality of complexity and breed on the long finish. Monsieur Coquelet, who is the stepson of Georges Descombes, makes very, very good wines from the natural school, with very little SO2 additions in the cellar, so this wine is a bit more forward structurally than several comparably serious 2011 Crus and is drinking very well indeed right now. Fine juice, but this is one 2011 that I would be drinking over the next half dozen years, rather than burying in the cellar. 2013-2020+. **91+.**



Damien Coquelet at a tasting here in the states.

Moulin-à-Vent

2011 Moulin-à-Vent “les Trois Roches”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2011 Les Trois Roches from Pierre-Marie Chermette is every bit as stunning today as it was a year ago. The deep, pure and vibrant nose soars from the glass in a complex mélange of cassis, dark berries, French roast, a touch of gamebird, dark soil tones and a gentle framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and stunningly pure on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, very refined tannins, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and perfectly balanced finish. Out of the blocks a year ago, this was notable for its very suave structural sophistication, and nothing has changed in this respect over the past twelve months and this remains a brilliant, young example of Moulin-à-Vent. 2014-2035. **94.**

2011 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2011 Moulin-à-Vent from Jean-Paul Brun is a superb wine, wafting from the glass in a pure and primary nose of black cherries, dark berries, coffee bean, a touch of graphite, dark soil tones, fresh thyme, woodsmoke and a bit of chicory. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a low acid, focused and very refined personality, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the beautifully balanced, firm and primary finish. This will be a superb bottle of Moulin-à-Vent with some bottle age, but I would not be tempted to open a bottle for another five years. Despite its low acids (so typical of this vintage), this wine possesses such superb balance that it should prove to be very long-lived. High class juice. 2017-2040+. **93+.**

2010 Moulin-à-Vent- Maison Joseph Drouhin

Another year has passed since I last opened a bottle of the 2010 Moulin-à-Vent from Maison Drouhin, and the wine is just beginning to stir again after a year of hibernation. From the outset, I have really liked this particular bottling from the Drouhins in 2010, and the wine is clearly going to be a classic example of Moulin-à-Vent in the fullness of time. The excellent bouquet is still pretty primary, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of cassis, dark berries, French roast, a bit of chicory, incipient notes of gamebird, fresh thyme and the very first signs of the autumnal soil signature the wine will eventually show. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very elegant, with a lovey core of fruit, incipient complexity, moderate, well-measured tannin and great length and grip on the tangy and blossoming finish. This is getting closer to primetime drinking, but still give it a couple of years to really come into its own. It is so well-balanced that it is going to last forever! This is another 2010 Drouhin Cru Beaujolais that is still in the market here, and folks are crazy not to be snapping this beautiful bottle up and tucking it away in the cellar! 2015-2035+. **93.**

2010 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Grand Moulin (Xavier et Nicolas Barbet)

The 2010 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Grand Moulin is an outstanding example of the vintage that is almost ready to start drinking well and offers up a classic, dark soil signature and a lovely black fruity personality on both the nose and palate. The blossoming bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, black cherries, fresh thyme, a great base of soil tones, espresso, a bit of bonfire and a judicious topnote of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a very clean and balanced profile, a lovely core, superb transparency, a bit of firm tannin still to resolve and a very long, tangy and soil-driven finish. This wine would drink well right now with the right food (the beef stew I have simmering away on the stove as I write this note would work just fine!), but it is really still two or three years away from fully blossoming and really starting to show all of its layers of complexity. A fine, fine bottle of young Moulin-à-Vent. 2016-2040. **92+.**

2008 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Grand Moulin (Xavier et Nicolas Barbet)

The 2008 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Grand Moulin is still on the young side and could use a couple more years in the cellar to more fully blossom, but there are some good things going on here in the glass. The bouquet is still very much “cooler vintage” in character, but, also deep and complex, as the wine offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, espresso, charred wood, dark soil tones, fresh thyme, just a hint of dried violet and a bit of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and is starting to show a bit of sappiness at the core, with fine focus and balance, still some chewy tannins, good acids and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex and soil-driven finish. This wine is still a few years away from primetime drinking, but if this is a beacon for how the top 2012s will evolve, then all is not lost with that vintage! I love how this wine’s sweetness at the core really builds with air. This is going to be serious juice in a couple more years. 2016-2035+. **91.**

1991 Moulin-à-Vent “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Diochon

While I have only had a few examples in recent times from the 1991 vintage in Beaujolais, it seems pretty clear from those wines that the vintage was as strong here as it was a bit further north for red Burgundy. The ’91 Diochon old vine cuvée of Moulin-à-Vent is a truly stunning bottle of wine that is still a bit on the young side and took fully ninety minutes in decanter to really blossom and show all of its potential. Happily (and this does not happen that often), there were only two of us for this dinner and we had another wine open to follow at the same time, so we could give this wine as much air as it needed and we were richly rewarded for

a bit of patience. Once hitting on all cylinders, this wine offers up a superb and complex nose of dark berries, autumn leaves, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, cigar ash, a touch of acorn and a bit of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and very suave on the attack, with a lovely core and balance, tangy acids and still a bit of tannin perking up the very long and beautifully mature finish. The 1991 Moulin-à-Vent “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Diochon is certainly fully into its apogee of maturity at age twenty-two, but it should prove to be a very long-lived example of the vintage and clearly still has decades of fine drinking ahead of it! 2013-2035+. **94.**

Fleurie

2012 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2012 Clos de la Roilette is a pretty modestly ripe wine this year, with the struggles of Fleurie clearly in evidence here. The wine has a green streak through it on both the nose and palate, but also offers up fine aromatic complexity in its mix of black cherries, cassis, a touch of pepper, oak leaves, dark soil tones and herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and tangy, with a good, solid core, moderate tannins and a long, youthful finish that shows a fair bit of *herbacité*. Hail clearly had an affect here- though seemingly more so in the vines spending a fair bit of mid-summer energy trying to repair vegetation damage, as opposed to ripening the bunches. This could be interesting with bottle age, as it is long and complex, but it may always have a bit of a green streak running through it. 2015-2025. **86+.**

2012 Fleurie “Le Clos Cuvée Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de la Cour (Jean-Louis Dutraive)

The 2012 Le Clos Vieilles Vignes from Monsieur Dutraive is one of the top examples that I have tasted from the village in this vintage, with a lovely sappiness to the fruit component from the old vines. This is not a big wine, but rather a chiseled thoroughbred, offering up a very fine bouquet of pomegranate, cherries, a touch of sandalwood, a lovely base of soil tones, violets and cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and laser-like in its focus, with good, but not great depth at the core, vibrant acids, and a bit of tannin on the backend (some from the barrels no doubt) that will be happier with a year’s worth of bottle age. This is not a big wine, but rather one of excellent intensity of flavor and it really is a fine, fine result in the tough 2012 vintage in Fleurie. 2014-2025. **92.**

2012 Fleurie- Jean-Louis Dutraive

I am surmising that this bottling is selection from the Clos de la Grand Coeur vineyard of Monsieur Dutraive, brought about by the vagaries of the vintage in Fleurie. Folks may recall that Monsieur Dutraive trained for a bit with Christophe Roumier in Chambolle prior to taking over the family estate in Fleurie, and he uses some older Roumier barrels for his wines. The 2012 Fleurie shows a bit of new wood in its aromatic blend of strawberries, blood orange, mustard seed, a dollop of soil and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and clean, with a nice core, tangy acids, adequate ripeness and a bit of tannin on the long and bouncy finish. I really like the intensity of flavor and complexity of this svelte middleweight Fleurie, which works really well at the table. 2013-2020+. **89.**

2012 Fleurie- Domaine Julien Sunier

The 2012 Fleurie from Julien Sunier is another very pretty middleweight from the vintage, but as is the case with the above wine, I wonder if a touch more new wood was used here for the *elevage* to give the wine just a bit more backbone that what the vintage provided. The very clean nose is bright, transparent and complex, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of red berries, cherries, a bit of allspice, a nice base of soil, fresh thyme, roses and cedar. On the palate

the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor (though not a lot of mid-palate weight), vibrant acids, a bit of tannin and very good length and grip on the soil-driven finish. I would be tempted to drink this wine in its relative youth, as it seems that there is as much structure as stuffing and there is a chance that they will not both finish on the same page. But, it is a lovely, red fruity and transparent middleweight for mid-term drinking. 2013-2020+? **89.**

2012 Fleurie “Les Garants”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2012 Fleurie “Les Garants” from Domaine du Vissoux is a very pretty wine, but it is not in the same magical league as the 2011 bottling. As readers may recall, the Les Garants *lieu à dit* is a southwesterly-facing vineyard that lies on a base of pink granite flecked with both mica and quartz, which often makes this one of the more soil-driven examples of Fleurie. The bouquet on the 2012 is quite attractive, offering up scents of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of peppercorn, plenty of herbal tones, a nice base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and complex, with a very good core of fruit, good balance, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the already quite approachable finish. A very good bottle for drinking over the next eight to ten years. 2013-2023. **89.**

2011 Fleurie- Château de Fleurie

It has been nearly a year since I last tasted the 2011 Château de Fleurie and time has done nothing to take away from the luster of this outstanding example of the vintage. The deep, pure and sappy nose jumps from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, a touch of cocoa, woodsmoke, violets, fresh herbs and a hint of the gamebird to come with extended aging. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush at the core, with fine focus and balance, a bit of the vintage’s tannin and a nice, savory streak of youthful *herbacité* running down the middle and adding an additional layer of complexity (for those of us who like this sort of thing). The tannins are falling away nicely, and though they are still a touch present on the backend right now, the wine is already drinking very well. It is a broad-shouldered example of Fleurie that is quite emblematic of the vintage and a fine bottle. 2013-2025+. **92+.**

2011 Fleurie “La Madone”- Domaine de Prion

The Chanudet brothers- Sylvain and Christian- are the winemakers behind the superb wines at Domaine de Prion and they certainly deserve to be ranked up there these days with the very finest producers in this village. The La Madone bottling hails from the *lieu à dit* that sits at the very summit of the hill in Fleurie, with this wine being raised entirely in cement tanks, and the 2011 is stunning, soaring from the glass in a pure and vibrant blend of black cherries, woodsmoke, bitter chocolate, fresh herb tones, just a whisper of gamebird and a gently spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off a fair bit of the vintage’s structure, with a fine core of fruit, moderate, ripe tannins and lovely length and grip on the poised and well-balanced finish. This is certainly approachable today, but a couple of years’ worth of bottle age will reward one with secondary layers of complexity and tannins that should have melted away nicely. A really lovely example of the vintage. 2015-2025+. **90+.**

2011 Fleurie “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de Prion

As I noted last year, the old vine bottling from Domaine de Prion is comprised of a selection of seventy to eighty year-old vines and which is raised in two year-old Burgundy barrels purchased from Domaine Ramonet in Chassagne. The 2011 version is absolutely stunning, offering up a deep and sappy nose of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, violets and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied, pure on the attack and impressively sappy at the core, with great focus and balance, a fair bit of the vintage's tannins ripely displayed on the backend, and outstanding length and grip on the classy finish. I love this really deep example of Fleurie, but give it a few years in the cellar to allow the tannins to soften a bit and the wine to really blossom. 2016-2035. **93+**.

2011 Fleurie- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2011 Fleurie from Jean-Paul Brun is a young bottle in need of some time alone in the cellar, but this is going to be a lovely wine in the fullness of time. But, this is a young and fairly structured 2011 Fleurie, offering up a deep and very pure nose of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of cocoa, violets, dark soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs and lavender. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, excellent focus and grip, a very primary personality and outstanding length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is going to be a terrific wine, but plan on tucking it away in the cellar for at least another two or three years- it will be at its apogee a decade down the road! 2016-2035. **93+**.

2010 Fleurie- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2010 Drouhin Fleurie is really a very classic example of this lovely cru and a wine that is drinking very well at the present time, jumping from the glass in a complex and very pure bouquet of red and black cherries, cocoa, violets, a touch of fresh thyme, lovely soil tones, incipient notes of gamebird and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and intensely flavored, with lovely complexity, fine focus and grip, a nice girdle of acidity and excellent length and grip on the softly tannic and very well-balanced finish. The secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate are beginning to emerge here, but the wine still shows lovely structure and I suspect that this will be a very long-lived vintage for this bottling. Amazingly, this wine is still available in (at least) the New York market, and I would not be hesitating to add this to my lineup of offerings, as it is an utterly complete wine that offers up a far more interesting glass of wine than a great many of the 2012s. 2013-2030+. **91**.

2009 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

This was my first bottle of the 2009 Clos de la Roilette out of the case that I bought and the wine was starting to drink very well, though I am inclined to let the remainder of my bottles stay in the cellar at least another couple of years before I really start to consider drinking them with regularity. The bouquet on the '09 is deep, ripe and pure, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, pomegranate, a lovely base of dark soil tones, chocolate, fresh herbs and a topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with fine focus, a lovely core of fruit, tangy acids, just a whisper of tannin and lovely length and grip on the still slightly shut down finish. This is a good drink now, but will be a great drink in a few more years and it will be well worth the wait to give it a bit more time to develop in the cellar! 2015-2040. **93+**.

Régnié

2012 Régnié- Domaine des Braves (Paul Cinquin)

Paul Cinquin is one of my favorite producers in the cru of Régnié and his 2012 is a really strong example of the vintage- albeit with that vein of *herbacité* running down the spine of the wine on the palate. The bouquet is deep, complex and very expressive in its mélange of cherries, pomegranate, dried oak leaves, lovely soil tones, roses and fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and still quite tightly-knit, with a good core, fine transparency, and a fair bit of slightly dry-edged tannins perking up the long and savory finish.

There is a bit of backend bitterness here that suggests that this wine may never fully soften up and will need to be drunk through its tannins, but at least there is plenty of complexity to be found here in its slightly weedy profile. 2013-2020+? **88.**

2011 Régnié “Sans Soufre Ajouté”- Château de la Pierre

The 2011 Régnié “Sans Soufre Ajouté” from Château de la Pierre is a lovely example of the vintage for near-term drinking, but I would be hesitant to keep this in the cellar too long. Today, the wine is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a mix of black cherries, a touch of cola, dark soil tones, fresh thyme and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open, with a fine core, lovely complexity, soft tannins and a very long, juicy and *à point* finish. I know that low sulfur wines are the rage in Paris right now, but it really seems to me that some potential longevity has been sacrificed here to the tides of fashion. 2013-2015. **89.**



Morgon

2012 Morgon “Corcelette” Vieilles Vignes- Daniel Bouland

Daniel Bouland only owns four hectares of vines in Morgon, but he has vines in some of the very finest vineyards and no shortage of old vines. For example, this parcel in Corcelette was planted in 1925! The 2012 Corcelette is quite emblematic of the vintage, offering up a fairly open bouquet (particularly for young Morgon) of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones, a dollop of red curry, a lovely and complex base of soil, a touch of acorns and a gentle

topnote of white pepper. On the palate the wine is focused and full-bodied, with a good core, fine signature of soil, a bit of chewy tannin and very good length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. There is an ever so slightly dry edge to the tannins here that may mean they will always be part of the package, but, coupled with its fine complexity and intensity of flavor here, I might be tempted me to drink this wine relatively early. This wine clearly has a streak of herbaceousness in it that may be off-putting to some, but there is also a lot to like here. 2013-2023+. **88.**

2012 Morgon “Delys”- Daniel Bouland

As is proudly stated on the label, Monsieur Bouland’s parcel in the *lieu à dit* of Delys was planted in 1926, making these vines one year younger than his vines in Corcelette, but still plenty old by any definition. The 2012 Delys is one of the most complete and classic examples of the vintage that I had the pleasure to taste in preparation of this report, as the wine shows superb mid-palate stuffing and outstanding structure for aging. The deep and youthful nose offers up scents of black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, dark soil tones, a bit of coffee bean, dusty rose, fresh thyme, incipient notes of fallen leaves, a touch of white pepper and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a fine core of fruit, firm tannins and a long, youthful and chewy finish. There is lovely soil inflection here, a gentle streak of savory *herbacité* on the palate (that is a bit more forceful than the fresh thyme on the nose would suggest), and a sturdiness to the tannins that will want a few years to soften. This is a very good example of the 2012 vintage, but it will need some time to really blossom, and like many of the 2012s, it may always have a fair bit of *herbacité* in its aromatic and flavor profiles. 2015-2025+. **89+.**

2012 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Michel Guignier

It hurts that two of my favorite crus, Fleurie and Morgon, were singled out for hail storms this year, and it seems that several producers opted for a bit of new wood in this vintage (not that the two may be interrelated in any way!) and there seems to be some evident here. These sixty-two year-old vines from the Morgon *lieux à dits* of La Roche Pilée and Les Grands Cras have crafted a very pretty nose of cranberries and black cherries, cedar, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a dollop of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and tangy, with a fair bit of tannin, moderate mid-palate depth, good acids and a long, chewy finish. This is a very clean and transparent example of the vintage. Like a few other examples of the vintage, there is as much structure here as stuffing and I might be inclined to drink this wine early on, while the balance is still very fine, as there is not telling that the two elements will age concurrently on the same tack. 2013-2020. **88.**

2012 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Jean-Marc Lafont

This was the first time I had tasted the Morgon “Côte du Py” from Jean-Marc Lafont and this is one of the most successful 2012s that I tasted from the village. The bouquet is deep, youthful and impressively ripe and pure, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, pomegranate, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of stony soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of dried roses in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, moderate tannins, bright acids and very good length and grip on the focused finish. There is just a touch of backend autumnal tones starting to emerge, which will become redolent of fallen leaves, dried herbs and acorns with extended bottle age, but this is one of the most thoroughly ripe 2012s that I tasted in preparation for this report and I would not expect this wine to go autumnal for several years. 2014-2024. **89+.**

2012 Morgon- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Jean-Paul Brun's 2012 Morgon is a very good bottle in the making, but it will need some time to blossom from behind its structural elements, and it does not totally escape from the *herbacité* of the vintage in some communes. But, there is a lot of stuffing here and some very promising complexity that suggests this will be a very good bottle of wine down the road- perhaps always a touch weedy- but also, deep, complex and with a sweet core of fruit. The bouquet is quite primary, but deep and bright, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, vinesmoke, a touch of white pepper, granite, French roast, hints of oak leaves and a bit of dried violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chewy, with a fine core of fruit, firm, slightly dry-edged tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, chewy finish that closes with a note of dried oak leaf. This will walk a fine line during its life between austerity of structure and generosity of fruit, and my gut instinct is that it will have a relatively short window of peak drinkability where the tannins fall away enough to really allow the wine to blossom, but probably the wine will always have a bit of tannin and after a half dozen years or so, they will begin to get the upper hand again. This is purely speculative, but I certainly envision the wine behaving thusly- four or five years down the road offering up very good drinking, and then fading over the following decade. There are some really positive attributes here, but also some of the idiosyncrasies of the vintage. 2017-2024+? **88+**?

2011 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Château Grange Cochard

Château Grange Cochard, owned by the couple of Sarah and James Wilding since 2008, is clearly becoming one of the finest estates in all of Villié-Morgon, and their 2011s are truly brilliant wines. As readers may recall from my notes on the 2010s last year, the old vine bottling is a blend of a few parcels of fifty year old vines, and the 2011 is a stunningly pure and vibrant example of the vintage, soaring from the glass in an aromatic smorgasbord of black cherries, pomegranate, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and incipient notes of gamebird. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and sappy at the core, with moderate, beautifully integrated tannins, outstanding focus and grip and a very, very long, complex and classy finish. A stunning wine! 2013-2035. **93+**.

2011 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château Grange Cochard

As I noted last year, the Côte du Py bottling from Château Grange Cochard hails from the oldest vines on the estate- one hundred and one years of age (in 2011) and planted at the very summit of this famous vineyard. The wine is brilliant, offering up a vibrant aromatic constellation of black cherries, plums, chocolate, stony, dark soil tones (the granitic base of Côte du Py is far more evident here than in the blended, Vieilles Vignes bottling) woodsmoke and a touch of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a rock solid core of pure fruit, a lovely sense of the vintage's sappiness, firm tannins and simply great length and grip on the youthful and very serious finish. Great juice. 2016-2040. **94+**.

2011 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Damien Coquelet

Damien Coquelet is still a very young *vigneron* (now in his mid-twenties), and to my knowledge, he continues to rent vines for his lovely range of wines- all of which has been converting over to organic viticulture since renting his parcels. His 2011 Morgon “Côte du Py” is a classic example of the vintage, with lovely structure and a chewy personality that still will want some time in the cellar to blossom, but with superb purity and nascent complexity already very much in evidence. The deep and complex bouquet offers up scents of red and black cherries, a

fine base of stony soil, fresh herb tones, a bit of French roast, gamebirds, fresh thyme and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with a fair bit of tannin, good focus, low acids and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is a very good bottle of Morgon that should blossom nicely in another year or two. As is a low sulfur bottling, I do not have a really good sense of how long it will last in the bottle, but it should drink very well at least through 2020 and perhaps far longer. There is a noble rusticity to this wine that I really like. 2014-2020+. **92.**

2011 Morgon “la Voute Saint Vincent”- Domaine Louis & Claude Desvignes

The 2011 la Voute Saint Vincent from Domaine Louis & Claude Desvignes is a beautiful young bottle of Morgon, wafting from the glass in a deep, sappy and serious bouquet of black cherries, cocoa, a touch of dark berry, woodsmoke, a beautifully complex base of dark soil tones, fresh thyme and incipient notes of gamebird. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a sappy core of fruit, superb soil signature, great focus and nascent complexity, chewy tannins and perfect balance on the very long and classic finish. This is really a superb bottle in the making, but give it a few years to blossom from behind its structure and develop some secondary layers of complexity. 2015-2035. **92.**

2011 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2011 Morgon “Côte du Py” from Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes is excellent and youthful, offering up a deep and primary nose of black cherries, dark berries, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke, dark chocolate, fresh thyme, gamebirds and a bit of coffee bean in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite ripe, with a superb core of sappy fruit, excellent soil inflection, moderate tannins (particularly for a 2011 Morgon!) and outstanding length and grip on the focused, fairly low acid and promising finish. I would tuck this away for two or three years to let the tannins fall away a bit more and the secondary layers of complexity to emerge, but it will not need as much time in the cellar to blossom as many of the top 2011 Morgons. Good juice. 2015-2030+. **92.**

2011 Morgon “Javernières”- Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

This was the first time I had crossed paths with the 2011 Morgon “Javernières” from Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes and the wine is superb, offering up a deep, complex and youthful bouquet of red and black cherries, pomegranate, granite, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke and hints of the gamebirds to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with beautiful focus and balance, ripe, chewy tannins, fairly low acids, superb soil signature and outstanding length and grip on the primary and very, very promising finish. This is a classic example of the superb 2011 vintage and will be a cellar treasure in the fullness of time. 2016-2040. **94.**

2011 Morgon- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2011 Morgon from Joseph Drouhin has continued along its steady evolutionary arc since I last saw a bottle a year ago and is one of the most elegant Morgons that one is going to come across in this vintage. The bouquet is deep, complex and very classy, offering up scents of red and black cherries, dark chocolate, a superb base of granite, a bit of spit-roasted gamebird, blossoming notes of chicory, fresh herbs and a smoky topnote redolent of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, superb focus and balance, modest tannins and a very long, complex and classy finish. This is not the most concentrated 2011 Morgon out there, but it may well be the most elegant to be found in the vintage. Lovely juice in the classically understated, Drouhin house style. 2013-2025+. **92.**

2011 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Michel Guignier

The 2011 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes” from Michel Guignier is developing in any absolutely classic direction and is every bit as promising today as it was a year ago. The pure, vibrant and really deep nose wafts from the glass in a superb mélange of red and black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, woodsmoke, notes of gamebirds to come with more bottle age, dark, stony soil tones, a touch of espresso, fresh thyme and perhaps just a whisper of cedar starting to emerge in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with superb structure, excellent focus and balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins and superb complexity on the very long and still fairly youthful finish. This is a dynamite bottle of young Morgon that seems even more impressive when viewed within the context of how the 2012 vintage has turned out in comparison. Great and utterly classic Morgon! 2015-2035+. **93+**.

2011 Morgon “Bio-Vitis”- Domaine Michel Guignier

A years’ worth of bottle age has done this lovely wine proud, as it had deepened and mellowed structurally, while not losing any of its lovely depth at the core or its great length or grip on the backend. The superb and almost sappy nose is still quite primary in its blend of black cherries, dark berries, stony soil tones, woodsmoke, a dollop of fresh thyme, espresso and a lovely floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and focused, with a sappy core, superb soil signature, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the beautifully balanced and classic finish. This is still young and chewy and in need of a few more years to really blossom, but it is going to be a terrific bottle of Morgon! 2016-2035+. **93**.

2009 Morgon “les Charmes”- Domaine du Crêt de Ruyère (Jean-Luc Gauthier)

As readers may recall from notes on previous releases from Monsieur Gauthier, he holds back his various bottlings of Morgon until he deems them starting to blossom, so that the cuvée of 2009 les Charmes is a brand new release from this fine producer. The wine offers up a superb bouquet that shows plenty of secondary layers of complexity in its blend of cherries, pomegranate, bonfires, forest floor, a bit of venison, spice tones and an exotic topnote of red curry. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant and red fruity for a 2009, with a lovely core, excellent complexity, modest tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. There is a bit of volatile acidity here (as has been the case with a few other bottlings I have tasted from Monsieur Gauthier in the past) and decanting is recommended to really let the wine settle down and sing in the glass. But, once it does, it is superb. 2013-2030+. **92**.

2008 Morgon “Tradition”- Domaine du Crêt de Ruyère (Jean-Luc Gauthier)

The 2008 Morgon “Tradition” bottling from Jean-Luc Gauthier is a really lovely example of the vintage, with the touch of VA that I often find in this domaine’s wines, but which nicely blows off with decantation. The bouquet is deep, complex and classy, offering up scents of sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, autumnal tones, coffee, a bit of gamebird and a great base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely attack, a fine core, moderate tannins, good acids and a nice vein of fresh herb tones running through the palate, which is not really evident on the nose, but which adds another layer of savory complexity to the long finish. Make sure you decant this! 2013-2020+. **90**.



Brouilly

2011 Brouilly- Maison Joseph Drouhin

It has been a year since I last tasted the Drouhin 2011 Brouilly and the wine has blossomed nicely from behind its structure over the course of that time and is really starting to drink nicely. This is a deep and really rock solid example of Brouilly, offering up a fine bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, dark chocolate, lovely soil tones, a bit of juniper berry and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really shows off excellent stuffing at the core from the style of the vintage, with still a bit of tannin, lovely focus, good acids and outstanding length and grip on the intense and still pretty primary finish. I am usually accustomed to Brouilly wearing its heart on its sleeve right from release, but this is a serious bottle of Brouilly that will age long and gracefully and will be even better down the road. Great juice that I seem to have underrated a tad last year. 2013-2025+. **91+**.

2011 Brouilly “Pierreux”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2011 Brouilly “Pierreux” from Pierre-Marie Chermette is really starting to sing and has blossomed even a bit more briskly than I thought it would a year ago and is now drinking superbly well and I can see no good reason not to be popping bottles today. The beautiful nose offers up scents of red and black cherries, dark chocolate, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of soil and a dollop of espresso bean. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, melting tannins and a very long, bouncy and superbly complex finish. This wine has the balance to age gracefully for a very long time, but it has such

charm right now that it is going to be very difficult to keep one's hands off of bottles of this wine in the cellar! 2013-2030. **92.**

2010 Brouilly- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2010 Brouilly from Joseph Drouhin has started to reemerge from its period of slumber (which it was embarking on when I last tasted the wine a year ago) and is again drinking well. The nose is still quite primary in its blend of cherries, pomegranate, a bit of vinesmoke, a dollop of chocolate, lovely soil tones and a bit of oak leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full and tangy, with a good core, still fairly tight structure and very good length and grip on the soil-driven and very pure finish. There was a lovely sappiness to this wine at the core when it was young, and one can still sense this lurking on the nose, but the wine is still a bit reticent on the palate and that sappiness has still not returned full force- though I believe it will with a bit more bottle age. A lovely bottle that I would still hold until next year to let it fully blossom again from behind its structural elements. 2014-2025. **90+.**

Côte de Brouilly

2012 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Melanie”- Daniel Bouland

The 2012 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Melanie” from Daniel Bouland is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a bright and transparent nose of cherries, cranberries, vinesmoke, a lovely base of soil tones, fresh herbs and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and beautifully soil-driven, with a good, solid core, fine focus and balance, quite modest tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. A fine bottle for relatively near-term consumption. 2013-2023. **89+.**

2012 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2012 Côte de Brouilly from Jean-Paul Brun is a lovely example of the vintage and will be an excellent drink in the fullness of time, but it is very tight out of the blocks and will demand some bottle age to blossom. The bouquet is quite pure and classic, offering up complex mix of cranberries, cherries, a touch of gamebird, walnuts, roses, just a hint of vinesmoke and stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is clean, full-bodied, complex and tightly-knit, with a good core, lovely transparency, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This should prove to be one of the best wines from Monsieur Brun in 2012, but I would tuck it away for the next three years before starting to pull corks. 2015-2025. **90.**

ROUND TWO OF RECENTLY TASTED LOIRE VALLEY WINES LOTS MORE FROM THE 2012, 2011 AND 2010 VINTAGES



As I noted back in Issue 45, there were still several of my favorite importers of Loire Valley wines who I had not managed to get around to when preparing for my annual feature on this superb region at the start of the summer, and I have managed to cover quite a bit more ground over the ensuing couple of months. As I went into the style of the two most recent vintages in the Loire- 2011 and 2012- in some detail in Issue 45, I only offer brief vintage descriptions here and point readers back to that issue for a more complete summation of each growing season. While neither vintage would be characterized as exceptional, there were wide swings in the difficulties *vignerons* faced along the Loire River in each year, so that some regions had to struggle far less than others over the course of the two years. Starting with the 2012 vintage, on the eastern end of the river, the sauvignon blanc regions of Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé (as well as the satellite regions of Quincy, Menetou-Salon and Reuilly) really had quite a lot of success, with the only real difficulties being yields that were off around twenty percent or so from a normal crop load. However, as one pushed west, things got much more difficult, with the Touraine ravaged by hail during flowering and some vineyards losing as much as eighty percent of their crop. The quality can be excellent here, but there will not be much wine to go around. The red wine regions of Saumur-Champigny, Bourgueil and Chinon seemed to

have been quite successful in 2012, though it is still pretty early days to be commenting about those wines, as most have not yet been released. As one moves further west into the Anjou, 2012 was also a short crop (yields down roughly about twenty-five percent), but nowhere near as ravaged as was the case in the Touraine and it has produced some lovely wines from this area. The 2012 vintage in Muscadet looks outstanding, though again, crops levels were off, but, there are some superb wines out there from this year in this underrated region.

2011 was also a difficult year on the Loire, with the brightest spot clearly being the red wines from the great appellations. It is a forward year pretty much across the board in the Loire, as end of season rains arrived and forced growers to pick earlier than they would have liked, with the wines showing a touch of dilution and far more gentle structural elements as a result. The spring had been very precocious, which was a bit of a saving grace, as the summer was cool, grey and rainy, so that ripening of the grapes took forever in this vintage. If the winegrowers might have been rewarded with a great Indian Summer, it could have been a top-notch vintage, but autumn rains arrived too soon and forced everyone to pick before it was ideal. Still, there are some outstanding successes (in the context of the vintage) to be found in 2011, and for regions such as Chinon, Bourgueil and Saumur-Champigny, the wines are really miraculously superb in quality and will also offer up really lovely, early drinkability, which makes them a perfect follow-up to the more structured wines here from 2009 and 2010. I have also tasted some absolutely stellar efforts from as far afield as Muscadet, Vouvray, Montlouis, Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé in 2011, with the wines often a bit softer structurally than in a classic year, but with lovely depth and complexity and the balance to drink very well over the next five to ten years. But, in these regions, it is far more heterogeneous than is the case with the red wines, and one really has to pick and choose a bit to find the top examples from this vintage.

In short, neither year will rate as ideal, but 2012's biggest problem was a very short crop level in some sections, with the remaining grapes turning out some truly fine bottles. Except for 2012's most favored regions, such as Muscadet, Chinon, Bourgueil, Saumur-Champigny, Sancerre and Pouilly-Fume (and friends), where yields are only down a bit in comparison to the more devastated crop loads of the central Loire, *vignerons* are never going to look back overly fondly on this growing season, as it was an awful lot of work for a fairly small quantity of grapes. But, at least the wines that were produced are very, very good. 2011 has probably produced wines at a lower overall level than 2012, though with the usual caveat that there are some ringing successes to be found here (particularly amongst the great red wine appellations of the central Loire) and there will be a lot of absolutely delicious wines right out of the blocks from the most successful producers in 2011. It is emphatically not a vintage to ignore wholesale, as the best wines are really very, very good and in many cases, will drink far better than their counterparts from 2009, 2010 and 2012 over the near-term. As is often the case, the 2011 vintage on the Loire is one where it pays to follow the top producers in each respective region, as they have often turned out wines of a quality level that far eclipses one's expectations of just what was possible in this difficult growing season, and wines that are truly fine by any stretch of the imagination. But, also be forewarned that there are some unpleasant 2011s out there as well, as some wines came in during the rains with plenty of rot, mildew and other scourges, and it has often been necessary to just pick everything (particularly where machine harvesting is used) and then hope to "scrub out" some of the impurities in the cellars- often with less than impressive results. So there are some decidedly "unclean" 2011s out there as well and one does have to pick

and choose to find the best examples of the vintage. There are also plenty of wines from 2011 that are quite modest in ripeness levels, and for those who do not want any “green” elements in their red wines for instance, one will probably want to pay fairly close attention to the octane levels on the wines, as those in the 11.5 percent range (and there are plenty in 2011) will probably have too much white pepper and herbal elements for your palate. In many cases, these are quite successful and tasty wines for those of us who do not mind these characteristics (within bounds) in our young red wines, as a great many of these middleweights also deliver very impressive complexity and lovely, perfectly-balanced personalities, but keep an eye on the alcohol level on certain 2011s if those types of wines leave you cold!

As is customary with the Loire Valley reports here, the wines are arranged geographically from west to east, and then within each sub-region, they are listed chronologically from youngest to oldest. The only exception to this is I have lumped all of the Rosé bottlings that I tasted for this report together at the outset of the tasting notes section, as there are only a small handful of these wines and it really did not make sense to place them in their geographical subset. As is always my custom, I have noted if a wine is closed with something other than a natural cork, as I am far from sanguine with the prospects of wines to age gracefully under other types of closures. While I did not taste too many examples, I note that some of the producers in the less well-known appellations have opted to start using “crown tops” for some of their wines meant for early drinking- probably done in a rather whimsical fashion for wines meant for unpretentious and festive gatherings while the wines are still young. While I have never done any research into how these types of closures work over the long haul, my gut instincts suggest that they may have many of the same issues as screwcaps do with permanent reduction over longer periods in the cellar and I would be inclined to drink wines sealed under “crown tops” in their youth. I would also remind folks who might have wines with this closure in the cellar to remember that there is no need to store these bottles laying down, and much like screwcaps, there may well be some benefit to storing the wines in a standing position.

Rosé

As I only had a small handful of Rosé bottlings to review for this issue, I have grouped them together at the outset of the piece, rather than tuck them away in their proper geographic regions.

L’Amarante Vin Mousseux Demi-Sec- Domaine de l’Enchantoir

The L’Amarante Vin Mousseux from Domaine de l’Enchantoir is comprised of one hundred percent cabernet franc, and though the estate is based in Saumur, the label does not denote the wine as sparkling Saumur. The color here is quite deep red, and the wine is really a sparkling red wine more than a rosé, but offers up a deep and lovely bouquet of dark berries, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, a touch of tree bark and a bit of coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and frothy, with a fine core of fruit, impressive soil signature and a long, crisp and winy finish. I really like this wine, which is clearly better-suited for work at the table, rather than as an *aperitif*. This is well-made, tasty and quite unique. 2013-2015. **88.**

Pow Blop Wizz Sparkling Rosé- Olivier Lemasson

This ruby red sparkler from Olivier Lemasson is a blend of Pinot d’Aunis and Trolleau and is bottled under a crown top. The wine is excellent, offering up a complex nose of cherries, cranberries, lovely soil tones, rye toast, just a touch of cinnamon stick and a topnote of dried rose

petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and frothy, with a fine core, lovely focus and complexity, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the classy finish. This has a whimsical package, but behind it lurks a very serious bottle of sparkling rosé! 2013-2015. **91.**

2012 Pépié Rosé- Marc Ollivier et Rémi Branger

The Pépié Rosé from Marc Ollivier et Rémi Branger is made from cabernet franc and the 2012 version is a lovely, light cherry red in color and offers up a deep and classy nose of cherries, a touch of red berry, wet stone minerality, smokiness, delicate spice tones and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and nicely balanced, with good framing acids, fine focus and good length and grip on the winy finish. Good juice that will be best at the table. 2013-2014. **87.**

2012 Cheverny Rosé- Hervé Villemade

The 2012 Cheverny Rosé from Hervé Villemade is a lovely, pale salmon color and offers up a very pretty and bright nose of wild strawberries, tangerine, lovely, chalky soil tones, a touch of orange zest and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with bright acids, lovely focus and very nice length and grip on the succulent finish. This will not age for too many years, but I love its freshness and purity, as there is not a hint of the “candied” side of rosé that one sometimes finds in the Loire. A really lovely wine. 2013-2014. **89.**

2012 Sancerre Rosé “l’Authentique”- Olivier et Florence Thomas-Labaille

The 2012 Sancerre Rosé “l’Authentique” from Domaine Thomas-Labaille is just a touch darker in color than the Cheverny Rosé from Hervé Villemade tasted alongside of it, but it shares the same brightness and purity. There is a striking purity of soil expression on the nose of this Sancerre Rosé, as the wine jumps from the glass in a mix of strawberries, a touch of blood orange, intense, chalky minerality, dried flowers and a touch of cut grass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and intensely flavored, with a superb blade of Sancerre chalkiness running down the spine of the wine, crisp acids and a long, youthful finish. This has plenty of depth, and I would opt for using this at the table, rather than as an aperitif, as there is a serious pinot noir character here that cries out for savory fare. 2013-2016. **88.**

Muscadet

2012 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine- Clos de la Lénaigerie (Jérôme Choblet)

This was the first wine I had ever tasted from Monsieur Choblet, and sadly this bottling was sealed up under screwcap and already quite reduced. The bouquet shows some of the tell-tale vegetality of reduction in its blend of green apple, asparagus, wet stones, lime zest and a bit of metallic minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and pinched on the backend from the reduction, with more overt metallic minerality than the nose shows today, crisp acids and good grip on the clipped and bitter finish. I have absolutely no doubts that this was a superb wine before it was put under this closure, as there is a good core and the remnants of impressive complexity here, but it already has one foot in the grave. What a waste! 2013-2014. **81.**

2012 Muscadet Côtes de Grandlieu sur Lie “Les Parcelles” – Domaine Hautes Noëlls

The 2012 bottling of Les Parcelles from Domaine Hautes Noëlls is a very pretty and forward bottle of Muscadet wafting from the glass in an aromatic mélange of tart pear, a touch of tangerine, straw, wet stones and a bit of citrus blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and juicy, with solid depth, moderate complexity, sound acids and good length and grip on the finish. This lacks a bit of the mineral precision and layered

complexity of the first division producers of Muscadet, but there is still good depth and intensity here for uncritical quaffing with *fruits de mer*. 2013-2015. **88.**

2012 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine - Domaine de la Pépière

The 2012 Muscadet regular bottling from Marc Ollivier's Domaine de la Pépière is a really beautiful wine and one of the most complete and classic examples of this bottling in several vintages. The bouquet is deep, pure and vibrant, offering up scents of lime, green apple, briny and stony soil tones, citrus peel and a nice touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and focused, good acids and outstanding length and grip on the well-balanced and wide open finish. This is clearly a wine that was made from outstanding selection and low yields, and it should prove to be quite long-lived, despite its acids being more ripe and supportive in nature, rather than bracing and youthful. 2013-2025+.

93.

2012 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine - Domaine des Quatre Routes (Eric Poiron)

The 2012 Muscadet from Domaine des Quatre Routes is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up very good depth and youthful complexity in its bright bouquet of apple, lime, wet stone minerality, a touch of lemongrass and a gently briny topnote of ocean breezes. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and very well-balanced, with the depth of the vintage very much in evidence at the core, vibrant acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This was my first experience from Eric and his father, Henri Poiron's wines, and I was most impressed. Another fine source of Muscadet. 2013-2020+. **90.**



2011 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Les Gras Moutons” - Domaine de la Pépière

The Les Gras Moutons is a relatively new addition to Messieurs Ollivier and Branger’s lineup, with the this vineyard have been purchased from a neighbor. This gently sloped vineyard is comprised of gneiss soils (a softer rock than granite), which offer a bit less overt, granitic minerality than other bottlings from the estate. The 2011 Les Gras Moutons offers up a lovely nose of lime, gentle notes of clementine, lovely stony soil tones, just a whisper of leanness, white flowers and a delicately saline topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure on the attack, with vibrant acids, laser-like focus, a fine core and outstanding grip and complexity on the very long and refined finish. The minerality here from the gneiss is almost silky in texture. A beautiful wine. 2013-2020+. **92.**

2010 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Le L d’Or”- Domaine Luneau-Papin

When I tasted the basic bottlings from Pierre Luneau-Papin from the 2010 vintage back in February of 2012, the Le L d’Or bottling was still resting comfortably on its lees in his cellars, and given how good the lower level cuvées were in this year, I have been looking forward to tasting this classic bottling. The wine certainly does not disappoint, as it offers up a deep and very precise nose of green apple, lemon, wet stone minerality, gentle notes of ocean breeze and a touch of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and beautifully focused, with a superb core of pure fruit, lovely, ripe acids and simply stunning length and grip on the focused and rock solid finish. This will show more of its leesy influence as the years go by, but today is more citric, stony and briny in personality. A great young bottle of Muscadet, but with the balance to already offer up really superb drinking. 2013-2035. **94.**

2010 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Butte de la Roche”- Domaine Luneau-Papin

This cuvée was launched in the 2008 vintage as “Terre de Pierre”, but was renamed for the actual vineyard name of Butte de la Roche in 2010. This is a great site, with a unique geological composition and the 2010 version has done great justice to this superb *terroir*. The bouquet is deep, bright, complex and classy, wafting from the glass in a mix of lemon, ocean breeze, a touch of dried flowers, a very complex base of stony soil tones, just a whisper of lees and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with stunning complexity, great focus and poise, a lovely core, brisk, ripe acids and outstanding length and grip on the dancing finish. This is one of the best young bottles of Muscadet I have ever had the pleasure to taste! 2013-2030+. **96.**

2009 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Excelsior”- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The Excelsior bottling from Domaine Luneau-Papin is made from seventy-five year-old vines originally planted from *selection massale* cuttings in a vineyard with fine southern exposure. The wine offers up superb precision and minerality for this riper vintage, jumping from the glass in a vibrant aromatic constellation of lime, a touch of pear, a beautiful base of minerality, gentle saline tones, a dollop of leanness and a lovely topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very complex, with a superb core of fruit, excellent acidity for the vintage and lovely mineral drive on the long and zesty finish. This is so beautifully balanced that it may age for a very long time, despite not being from a particularly high acid vintage. Great juice. 2013-2025+? **94.**

2009 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “3”- Marc Olliver et Rémi Branger

This bottling, which hails from Domaine de la Pépière’s partners, Marc Ollivier and Rémi Branger, is named for the three years it spends aging on its lees. The wine is an old vine

bottling selected from granitic soils in two of the top vineyards owned by the domaine- Clisson and Château Thebaud, with these old vines developing plenty of muscle in the ripe vintage of 2009, but relinquishing none of their cut and mineral drive. The bouquet is deep, complex and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of bread fruit, orange peel, a lovely base of complex leesy tones, a great base of granite and a lovely topnote of ocean breezes. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a great core, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and really refined finish. This is a bigger-styled Muscadet that loses none of the racy precision of a classic example of the appellation. Really impressive cut and grip for the riper 2009 vintage! 2013-2035. **94.**

2005 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Le L d’Or”- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The 2005 vintage of Le L d’Or is drinking superbly well and offers up outstanding precision and chiseled complexity on both the nose and palate. The excellent bouquet offers up a fine mix of lime peel, gentle pear, wonderfully refined, leesy tones, a touch of dried flowers and a lovely base of granitic soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with superb complexity and mid-palate depth, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the very elegant and dancing finish. The 2005 Le L d’Or is now into its apogee of peak drinkability, but at age eight, it still has decades of life ahead of it. A beautiful bottle of Muscadet. 2013-2030. **94.**

2005 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Clos des Briords” V.V.- Dom. de la Pépière

Ironically, Marc Ollivier’s US importer, Louis-Dressner, sent along a bottle of the 2005 Le L d’Or from Luneau-Papin amongst the samples for this article, while I had just come across a note on a bottle of Monsieur Ollivier’s Clos des Briords from the same vintage that I recently drank off of a restaurant list, so I had a chance to compare these two iconic Muscadets from the ’05 vintage fairly close together. The 2005 Clos des Briords is a beautiful bottle of mature Muscadet, offering up a deep and complex nose of lime, sweet grapefruit, lovely, briny, maritime notes, wet stones and ocean breezes. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with superb focus and grip, lovely acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. Out of the blocks, I preferred the *nervosité* of the top 2004 Muscadets to their 2005 counterparts, but wines such as this and the Le L d’Or from Luneau-Papin have aged beautifully. 2013-2030. **93+.**

2004 Muscadet Sèvre et Maine Sur Lies- Domaine Michel Brégeon

The 2004 Muscadet from Michel Brégeon is drinking in a beautiful place at the moment and still has plenty of life ahead of it. The first class bouquet offers up a complex blend of lime zest, green apple, salty minerality, a wisp of smokiness and a lovely topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and beautifully resolved, with a potpourri of mineral complexity, crisp acids, lovely focus and balance and fine length and grip on the classy and wide open finish. A lovely, lovely bottle of Muscadet that is at its apogee at age nine. 2013-2020. **92.**

Muscadet Rouge Bottlings

2012 La Pépière- Marc Ollivier et Rémi Branger

The 2012 version of this lovely, one hundred percent cabernet franc bottling from Muscadet wizard, Marc Ollivier, is really a lovely, transparent middleweight that shows no shortage of personality or intensity of flavor. In fact, (not surprisingly) it shows the same sensibilities of noble transparency and effortless complexity as is found in the Domaine de la Pépière’s white wines. The nose on the 2012 La Pépière is just lovely, wafting from the glass in a bright and classy blend pomegranate, red berries, woodsmoke, a touch of tree bark and a lovely

base of granite soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and very soil-driven, with a touch of backend tannin, good acids and fine length and grip. There is still just a touch of youthful spritz on the backend, so I would opt for decanting this wine if drinking it over the next year. A lovely middleweight. 2013-2020. **88.**

2012 La Pépiè “Côt”- Marc Ollivier et Rémi Branger

Monsieur Ollivier’s malbec vines are planted in his superb vineyard of Clisson, which is best known as being the source for one of his very finest single vineyard Muscadet cuvées. By the way, if you want a shortcut to spotting the differences between this wine and the La Pépiè Cabernet Franc bottling (as they both have identical front labels and one has to rotate the bottle a bit to see the *cépage*), the Côt has an orange capsule and the Cabernet Franc a dark red capsule (you’re welcome). The one hundred percent côt (or malbec) version of La Pépiè has turned out very, very well in the 2012 vintage, as the wine offers up a deep and youthfully complex nose of dark berries, tree bark, charred wood, dark soil tones (from the granite of Clisson?), chicory and a lovely topnote of balsam boughs. On the palate the wine is medium-full (but deeper and more black fruity than the cabernet franc version), with lovely mid-palate intensity, a lovely soil signature, moderate tannins and fine grip on the tangy and very, very long finish. Like the above, this is only twelve percent alcohol in 2012, and for those weaned on higher octane, more buxom specimens, this may seem a wee bit too ethereal for its score, but if one pays a bit of attention, it does not take long to realize that there is an awful lot going on in the glass here! 2013-2023. **90.**



Muscadet maven Marc Ollivier in his Clisson vineyard.

Anjou and Coteaux du Layon

2012 Anjou Blanc “The Magic of Ju-Ju- Agnès et René Mosse

I am imagining that this release of “The Magic of Ju-Ju” is from the 2012 vintage, but this information does not appear anywhere on either the front or back label of the sample bottle that I received. However, there is a code on the cork that ends in “12”, which I am assuming is the vintage. In any event, the wine is quite nice, offering up a ripe nose of apple, quince, honeycomb, a complex base of soil, orange peel and a touch of coffee in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite ripe, with a rock solid core, a fine signature of soil, good acids and a long, fairly heady backend that does not actually show any overt heat, but threatens to get a bit hot with extended bottle age. This has a lot of personality, but I would opt for drinking it early on in its evolution- just in case that backend ripeness starts to turn to heat as the fruit component evolves. 2013-2017+? **88.**

2011 Anjou Blanc “Le Clos des Rouliers”- Domaine Richard Leroy

Monsieur Leroy’s Le Clos des Rouliers is a .7 hectare vineyard that is planted with forty-eight year-old vines and located between the appellations of Coteaux du Layon and Quart de Chaumes. I had reported in the past that this was Monsieur Leroy’s “younger vine cuvée”, but this is not really accurate, as the primary difference between this and the Les Noëls de Montbenault (fifty-plus year-old chenin vines) are the soil type and exposition of the two vineyards. The soils here in Le Clos des Rouliers are flinty, whereas those in Les Noëls de Montbenault are volcanic, with the latter vineyard sitting right at the summit of the hill and are quite affected by the prevailing winds. In any case, the 2011 Le Clos des Rouliers is a superb and very serious bottle of dry chenin, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of apple, quince, a touch of wet wool, bee pollen, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. The 2011 vintage here in Anjou has made wines that will drink well from a very early age, and this wine should be lovely for the next decade. It is still a touch marked by its sulfur, and for those intent on drinking it right away, pop it in the decanter prior to serving to let it blossom. Fine juice. 2013-2023. **91.**

2011 Anjou Blanc “Les Noëls de Montbenault”- Domaine Richard Leroy

The Les Noëls de Montbenault is the larger and (slightly) superior vineyard in Monsieur Leroy’s stable, with perfect exposition at the summit of the appellation of Coteaux du Layon and chenin blanc vines that are now more than fifty years of age. The 2011, like the Le Clos des Rouliers from the same vintage, is still a tad marked by its SO2 and should be decanted if drunk young to let it blow off, but this is a more structured wine than the above and I would be inclined to give this three or four years in the cellar to really let it come into its own. The superb nose is deeper and more reserved than in the Le Clos des Rouliers, offering up notes of apple, peach, a superb base of complex soil tones, lanolin, a touch of apple skin and a lovely, esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and absolutely rock solid at the core, with superb structure and focus, an excellent girdle of acidity and outstanding length and grip on the zesty and perfectly balanced finish. This is a *tour de force* in the difficult year of 2011 and there is absolutely nothing off vintage about this stellar wine! 2016-2030+. **93.**

2011 Anjou Blanc- Agnès et René Mosse

The 2011 Anjou Blanc from Agnès et René Mosse is really a superb example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a deep and complex nose of pear, lanolin, a touch of custard, a fine base of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and

rock solid at the core, with good acids, lovely soil signature and a long, youthful finish that closes with a bit of backend, citrusy bitterness reminiscent of orange pith. The vintage characteristics here have given this wine a slightly “blunt” personality, but the depth and complexity here are quite admirable and this is a wine that I will be very happy to drink over the next five years. 2013-2018. **89.**

2011 Anjou Blanc “les Rouchefer”- Agnès et René Mosse

The 2011 Anjou Blanc “les Rouchefer” from Agnès et René Mosse is really a fine example of the vintage and offers up the inherent elegance of this bottling on both the nose and palate. The very classy bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of orange oil, sweet quince, custard, complex soil tones, lanolin and white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really deep at the core, with great focus and complexity, crisp acids and a very, very long, balanced and classy finish that closes with a note of backend orange peel. A revelation for the vintage. 2013-2020+. **92.**

2010 Anjou Blanc “Les Bergères”- Domaine Fournier-Longchamps

This was the first wine I had ever tried from Domaine Fournier-Longchamps, and it is quite good in its broad-shouldered and muscular style. The bouquet is deep and quite chenin in its composition of apple, quince, chalky soil tones, lime peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and still quite youthful, with a fine core, crisp acids and a still very primary, almost four-square finish. This wine needs another year of bottle age to fully blossom, but it should provide pretty good drinking (at a very fair price) when it has opened up. It will never be the most complex bottle of dry chenin blanc, but it has depth, stuffing and good soil signature. 2014-2020+. **87.**

Quarts de Chaumes

2008 Quarts de Chaumes- Château de l’Echarderie

The 2008 Quarts de Chaumes from Château de l’Echarderie is a lovely wine that shows plenty of botrytis on its bouquet of apricot, gentle honey tones, sweet quince, lanolin, a nice base of soil, orange zest and incipient notes of tea leaves. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a lovely core, fine balance and a very long, reasonably complex and gently honeyed finish. This wine is not glazed with the cleanest botrytis in the history of wine, but it offers up good drinking today and should last nicely for at least the next decade. 2013-2023+. **89.**

Anjou Rouge

2011 Anjou Rouge- Château Perray Jouannet

This is the first wine I had ever tried from Château Perray Jouannet and I was quite impressed, as the 2011 Anjou rouge offers up plenty of depth and nascent complexity in a full-bodied and well-balanced format. The fine bouquet is a blend of dark berries, cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a bit of tree bark and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a good core, some chewy tannins and very good length and grip on the long and chewy finish. There is just a touch of volatile acidity that pokes out on the backend, so give this a bit of aeration (or decant it prior to serving) to allow that to blow off before drinking. Good, honest cabernet-based wine that should age quite well over the coming decade. 2013-2023. **87.**

2011 Anjou Rouge- Agnès et René Mosse

The Anjou Rouge bottling from Domaine Mosse is comprised of a blend of cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc, with the franc vines a touch older (40-50 years of age) than the sauvignon (35 to 40 year-old vines). The 2011 is 12.5 percent alcohol and typically, quite deep, powerful and structured for aging. The youthfully black fruity nose offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, a fine base of soil, French roast, smoke and a nice topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, firm, well-integrated tannins, lovely focus and balance and a long, youthful and chewy finish. The balance here is so good that I am tempted to say one can drink this wine out of the blocks, but it is really meant for the cellar and will be better with at least three or four more years of bottle age. This is really a superb wine in the making. 2016-2030+. **91.**

Savennières

I have always loved Savennières, which in the past used to be at its best in top vintages with a good decade of bottle age, but this is another appellation where the long shadow of premature oxidation has cast a pall, and these days, I would not age any bottle of Savennières more than five or six years. In preparation for this report, I tasted a few bottles of Savennières that were clearly affected by premox (I did not review them, as clearly, with premature oxidation being a bottle by bottle phenomenon, there could well be much better bottles out there than what I tasted), and a few that seemed to be on the cusp of developing their first signs of this scourge and in need of early drinking. Of all the appellations in the Loire Valley for white wines, I have had more examples of premoxed bottles of Savennières than any other wine (though there are certainly other instances out there to be found in regions like Pouilly-Fumé as well) and it seems clear to me that until a cure is found, this is now an appellation where wines should be drunk up in their relative youth.

2011 Savennières “Arena”- Agnès et René Mosse

The 2011 Savennières “Arena” from Agnès et René Mosse is truly a stellar bottle of young Savennières that is wide open out of the blocks and drinking marvelously well, but will age as long as the vagaries of premox will allow. The deep and very clean nose wafts from the glass in a complex mélange of white peach, tangerine, lanolin, orange zest, smoke and a superbly classy base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, poised and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, outstanding focus and grip, superb complexity and a very, very long, perfectly balanced finish. A great bottle of Savennières for near-term drinking. 2013-2020+? **94.**

2010 Savennières- Domaine Laffourcade

The 2010 Savennières from Domaine Laffourcade is really very nicely low octane in personality, coming in at a cool twelve percent in alcohol. The wine offers up a very pretty nose of apple, quince, lanolin, a nice dollop of soil, a bit of youthful Chenin dustiness and a touch of paraffin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and complex, with a fine core, fairly soft acids for the vintage, a lovely signature of soil and impressive length and grip on the finish. This is still quite youthful in terms of its complexity, but with these low acids, I would suspect that drinking this on the early side is the best course. It is certainly long, focused and offers up lovely flavors and aromatics for near-term drinking, but it lacks the cut to age for more than a few years. Good juice for current drinking. 2013-2015. **88.**

2010 Savennières “l’Enclos”- Eric Morgat

The 2010 Savennières “l’Enclos” from Eric Morgat is a deep and very classical interpretation of this fine vintage, with excellent depth and complexity from its full year resting on the lees prior to bottling in Monsieur Morgat’s cellars. This is a pretty ripe example of Savennières, as the wine comes in at a full fourteen percent, but offers up outstanding drinking right out of the blocks with its bouquet of fresh pineapple, quince, a dollop of lanolin, a lovely base of soil, gentle leesy tones, citrus peel and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully focused, with a great core of fruit, superb soil signature, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the ripe and buxom finish. To my palate, there is just a touch of backend heat poking out here that suggests drinking this broad-shouldered and very serious bottle of Savennières on the earlier side will be well-rewarded, but in an age where premox is very much a concern in this appellation, perhaps this is the best style of wine to be producing here today. 2013-2016+? 91.

2009 Savennières “Clos du Papillon”- Domaine du Closel

The 2009 Clos du Papillon from Domaine du Closel was the least ripe of these three vintages that I tasted for this report, coming in at an even fourteen percent alcohol. The bouquet is deep, ripe and lovely, offering up notes of quince, a touch of pineapple, chalk dusty soil tones, a bit of lanolin and a topnote of honeycomb. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip, but a bit of backend heat that takes away from the elegance on the finish. At this level of ripeness, this wine is already a pretty good drink and does not seem likely to need time to blossom with bottle age, but I would have much preferred it with a bit lower octane. Not quite up to the usually exemplary standards of this iconic estate. 2013-2020+? 87.

2008 Savennières “Chamboureau”- Domaine Fournier-Longchamps

The 2008 Savennières “Chamboureau” from Domaine Fournier-Longchamps is a nice bottle for current drinking, offering up a complex bouquet of apple, quince, a touch of beeswax, orange peel, chalky soil tones, incipient notes of honeycomb and a dollop of lanolin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a fine core, crisp acids and a bit of overt citrus peel on the finish that takes away a bit from the elegance on the backend. This is a good bottle of Savennières that is done in a more forceful style. 2013-2020+? 88.

2008 Savennières “Roche aux Moines”- Domaine Fournier-Longchamps

The 2008 Savennières “Roches aux Moines” from Domaine Fournier-Longchamps seems just a touch more advanced than the Chamboureau bottling, as it offers up a deep, complex and already tertiary bouquet of honeyed lemon, pear, lanolin, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and incipient notes of new leather. On the palate the wine is fully mature and already starting to lose a bit of backend grip (first signs of premox?), with soft acids, good mid-palate depth and a reasonably long, wide open and fully mature finish. There is admirable complexity here, but this wine is already wearing its heart on its sleeve and needs drinking up over the next twelve months. 2013-2014. 87.

2007 Savennières “Clos du Papillon”- Domaine du Closel

It had been nearly two years since I last crossed paths with the 2007 Clos du Papillon, and the wine has aged quite briskly and is already at a nice point in its evolution for current consumption. The gently botrytized nose offers up scents of fresh apricot, honeyed quince, a nice touch of brown butter, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, a bit of leather and some orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite powerful from

the concentrating effects of botrytis, with lovely mid-palate depth, modest acids and a long, mature finish that closes with a slightly bitter phenolic note of citrus pith. I really liked this wine two years ago and would have never imagined it would have evolved so quickly, but this is now ready to go and should be consumed in the next year or two. The alcohol here is 14.5 percent, and it did not show any heat in its relative youth, but it is now hovering like a vulture on the backend and will soon start to poke through uncovered on the finish. Drink up while this is still a lovely wine. 2013-2016+? **89.**

Saumur Blanc

2011 Saumur Blanc “Terres Blanches”- Domaine de l’Enchantoir

The 2011 Saumur Blanc “Terres Blanches” from Domaine de l’Enchantoir shows some of the vagaries of the vintage, as the nose is not entirely clean, but there is some good stuffing here and the wine is not without interest. The bouquet is a mix of green pineapple, quince, grassy tones, smoke, a hint of honeycomb and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a rather deep-pitched profile, a good core, crisp acids and a long and intense finish. While this wine is not totally clean, there is plenty of stuffing and some interesting elements, and with the right food (such as pork or *rillettes*), this would not be a bad drink. The acids should carry the wine quite well, but I would still opt for drinking this on the early side, as I have no idea whether or not it will evolve in a positive direction. Clearly this bottling is serious juice in a good vintage and I look forward to the 2012 version. 2013-2016. **87.**

2005 Saumur Blanc- Domaine de Collier

I had never previously tasted a wine from Domaine de Collier and was surprised to hear from some fellow tasters at this dinner that this is a very expensive and highly sought-after bottling. The wine is certainly good, but it is really not that special and seemed quite a bit overpriced when friends told me the price tag on this wine. The bouquet on the 2005 offers up a mix of lime, a touch of pear, lanolin, citrus peel, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, crisp and not particularly complex, with a good core and sound focus and grip on the fairly short finish. Not bad, but hardly the stuff that legends are made from! 2012-2020+? **88.**

Saumur-Champigny

2012 Saumur- Château Fouquet (Domaine Filliatreau)

The basic Château Fouquet bottling from Domaine Filliatreau is made for early consumption, and the 2012 is a fine wine that is still a tad on the young side and needs a bit of coaxing to really blossom in the glass. With a touch of air, the wine delivers a fine and deep nose of dark berries, menthol, gravelly soil tones, a touch of bell pepper, espresso and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and still a bit chewy, with good stuffing, nascent complexity and very good length and grip on the still chewy finish. This is good juice, but is a bit more seriously structured than an everyday quaffer and really could use six months to a year in the cellar to really blossom. I would not be surprised at all to see this wine still drinking well ten to fifteen years down the road. Good juice. 2014-2024+? **88.**

2010 Saumur Puy Notre Dame “le Pied à l’Étrier”- Domaine de l’Enchantoir

The 2010 Saumur Puy Notre Dame “le Pied à l’Étrier” from Domaine de l’Enchantoir is a superb example of the vintage and has to be one of the best values out there for a top-notch red from this fine year. The bouquet is deep, youthfully vibrant and complex, offering up scents of red and black cherries, a touch of menthol, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, new leather and a touch

of currant leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core, excellent focus, moderate, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the soil-driven and complex finish. This is a dynamite bottle of wine that needs a year or two to really blossom, and the wine should drink beautifully for at least a decade and a half once it starts to sing. A very impressive bottle and a fine bargain! 2015-2030+. **91+**.

2010 Saumur-Champigny “la Grande Vignole”- Domaine Filliatreau (unfiltered)

The Grande Vignole bottling from Domaine Filliatreau is one of my favorite red wines in the entire Loire Valley, and the 2010 version is a fine and youthful example. The wine offers up a pure and nascently complex nose of black cherries, cassis, menthol, tree bark, gravelly soil tones and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a good core, a fair bit of tannin and fine focus and balance on the impressively long, young and tangy finish. The 2010 vintage has not given this wine as much youthful meat on the bone as other top recent vintages like 2005 and 2006, and this wine will need to be tucked away for a year or two to allow the tannins to peel back a bit and the wine to really blossom. But, with a bit of age, this will be a lovely wine. 2015-2025+. **90**.



Bourgueil

2012 Bourgueil “Merci la Vie”- Domaine l’Oubliée (Xavier Courant)

The 2012 Bourgueil “Merci la Vie” from Xavier Courant is a fine example of the vintage, with a very precise, low octane personality (twelve percent) coupled to a surprising sense of

sappiness to its fruit component. The complex bouquet offers up a lovely mélange of black cherries, cassis, a touch of saddle leather, dark soil tones, espresso and cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and beautifully balanced, with a good core, moderate tannins, good acids and lovely focus on the still fairly youthful finish. While this lovely bottle of Bourgueil is already approachable, I would be inclined to tuck it away for a year or two and really let the secondary layers emerge and the tannins fade to the background. 2014-2025. **89+**.

2011 Bourgueil “Trinch”- Catherine and Pierre Breton

The Trinch bottling is the Bretons’ young vine cuvée from many of their top crus, and the 2011 version is an excellent bottle of Bourgueil and a stellar value. The bouquet is a fine young blend of black cherries, cassis, dark soil tones, a touch of menthol, soy and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and black fruity, with a very good core, lovely soil inflection, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is really a lovely bottle that already drinks well, but which will clearly age well for a decade and beyond. 2013-2025. **90**.

2011 Bourgueil “Nuits d’Ivresse”- Catherine and Pierre Breton

The Nuits d’Ivresse bottling from Domaine Breton is produced entirely from parcels under *biodynamique* farming principals and the wine is a non-sulfur bottling for natural wine enthusiasts. In past vintages, I have not had great wine aging this more than five or six years in the cellar, but for drinking early on, the wine has always been very good and the 2011 is as serious bottle as I have yet tasted from this cuvée. The nose is pure, open and really lovely, offering up scents of black cherries, espresso, tree bark, gravel, cigar smoke and fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and properly structured, with an excellent core, firm, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. The nose is decidedly more open than the palate at this point in the wine’s evolution, but this is a wine of excellent potential that should really blossom with just a year or two of bottle age. Fine juice. 2014-2025+? **91**.

2011 Bourgueil “les Galichets”- Catherine and Pierre Breton

The single vineyard les Galichets bottling is produced from an excellent, gravel-based vineyard planted with fifty-five year-old vines, and the 2011 is exceptional. The youthfully complex nose wafts from the glass in a superb blend of sweet cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, a beautifully complex base of gravelly soil tones, currant leaf, a touch of grilled beef and a nice touch of fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and intensely flavored, with a fine core, well-measured tannins and truly outstanding length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. This vintage of les Galichets is really precise and classy, with a depth and amplitude that belies its twelve percent alcohol. 2017-2035+. **93+**.

2011 Bourgueil “Notre Histoire”- Domaine l’Oubliée (Xavier Courant)

The 2011 Notre Histoire cuvée from Monsieur Courant is a bigger, more structured wine than his “Merci la Vie” bottling and is built for some time in the cellar prior to primetime drinking. The wine is excellent, offering up a deep, pure and primary nose of black cherries, dark berries, bitter chocolate, a touch of leather, a fine base of gravelly soil tones, a touch of fresh herbs and a topnote of charred wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely fleshy at the core, with superb focus and balance, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the youthful and moderately chewy finish. This is going to be a superb bottle of Bourgueil, but give it some time to blossom. 2017-2030+. **91+**.

2011 Bourgueil “Tenue de Soirée”- Domaine l’Oubliée (Xavier Courant)

The Tenue de Soirée” bottling from Domaine l’Oubliée sees a bit of oak aging during its *elevage*, and is a structured and serious bottle of young Bourgueil that is designed for some extended cellaring. The 2011 is excellent, offering up a youthfully complex bouquet of cassis, dark berries, French roast, dark soil tones, a touch of balsam bough, new leather, chicory and a discreet base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely buttoned up for hibernation in the cellar, with a rock solid core of fruit, lovely soil inflection, a fair bit of tannin and outstanding length and grip on the focused and still quite primary finish. This will need time-first to fully integrate a bit of wood tannin (which will be no problem for the wine), and then to blossom from behind its structural elements and really start to drink at its full potential. Good juice, but be patient! 2019-2040. **92.**

2010 Bourgueil “la Dilettante”- Catherine et Pierre Breton

This is a lovely bottle of Bourgueil that is made for early drinking and is really showing well right out of the blocks. As readers may recall, the la Dilettante bottling is carbonically macerated to make it appealing right out of the blocks, as its primary audience are the wine buyers of Paris’ most popular bistros and brasseries. The bouquet is complex and vibrant, offering up notes of dark berries, coffee bean, gravel, a touch of tree bark and a lovely touch of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and nicely transparent, with good acids, very little tannin and lovely focus and balance on the long, intensely flavored and complex finish. There is not a ton of stuffing here in the mid-palate, but the wine does not need it and offers up lovely backend expansion and definition. Delicious. 2013-2018+? **89.**

2010 Bourgueil- Bertrand Galbrun

The 2010 Bourgueil from Bertrand Galbrun is a good, solid and quite structured example of the appellation that will need a few years of cellaring to blossom. The bouquet is a youthfully complex blend of cassis, a bit of barnyard, bell pepper, tree bark, a fine base of soil, cigar smoke and a touch of lead pencil in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and balance, a fair bit of ripe tannin and very good length and grip on the primary and palate-staining finish. There is plenty of potential here, but give the wine a few years to soften and start to develop its secondary layers of complexity. 2016-2030+. **89.**

2009 Bourgueil “les Perrières”- Catherine et Pierre Breton

The 2009 Bourgueil “les Perrières” from Catherine et Pierre Breton is a superb example of the vintage, with a deep and very classy nose of black cherries, coffee bean, menthol, woodsmoke, a touch of tree bark, Cuban cigar wrappers, a beautifully complex base of stony soil tones and just a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core of fruit, excellent focus and complexity, a plush core of fruit, and a fair bit of chewy tannins (some from the new wood) still waiting for full integration on the long and classy finish. This is an excellent wine, but as I have often said about previous vintages of the Bretons’ Perrières, this great *terroir* really does not gain much by its sojourn in new oak and it really would be even more special without the new wood playing any role in the wine. 2020-2050+? **92.**

Chinon

Chinon “Bag in a Box” Non-Vintage- Béatrice et Pascal Lambert

I have never tasted a better example of “bag in a box” wine than this very lovely Chinon from Béatrice et Pascal Lambert! The bouquet is deep, bright and utterly classic in its mélange of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, a hint of tree bark, a nice base of gravelly soil tones and a bit of juniper berry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and modestly tannic, with a juicy core, lovely focus and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced and classy finish. Obviously, this wine is not made to age, but in a bottle, I have little doubt it would keep nicely for eight to ten years! A true revelation of just what is possible with a bag in a box! 2013-2014? **88.**

2012 Chinon “les Granges”- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The les Granges bottling from Mathieu Baudry is the domaine’s youngest vine cuvée, with all of these vines under twenty-five years of age and planted on alluvial soils down by the river. The 2012 is a cool twelve percent alcohol (I love these low octane beauties!) and offers up a bright and very precise nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, espresso, a lovely base of soil, a touch of animal and a fine topnote of balsam bough. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with good, but not great depth at the core, lovely intensity of flavor, a bit of backend tannin and fine focus and grip on the long finish. I know that the “les Granges” is meant for early consumption, but the 2012 really will be better for a year or two in the cellar to blossom texturally. 2014-2030. **89+.**

2011 Chinon- Domaine Philippe Alliet

The 2011 Chinon from Philippe Alliet is a young and relatively tight bottle that needs a few years of cellaring to start to soften up and blossom, but which has good depth and complexity and should prove to be a good drink if given a bit of bottle age. The nose is young and shows off admirable depth, but it is still a puppy in its blend of cherries, menthol, a touch of leather, a fine base of soil, tree bark and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and tightly-knit, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil inflection, firm tannins and a long, low fat and an ever so slightly green finish that closes with impressive length and grip. This is a moderately ripe wine that has excellent constituent components and only needs some time in the cellar to blossom into a fine middleweight. 2015-2030+. **88+.**

2011 Chinon- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The 2011 “domaine” Chinon from the Baudry family is a superb and quite tightly-knit young bottle that needs a few years of bottle age to really come into its own, but which will be superb with a bit of patience. The fine bouquet is still pretty primary in its aromatic mix of black cherries, dark berries, gravelly soil tones, a touch of tree bark, gentle notes of menthol, espresso and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite young, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance, firm, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the soil-driven finish. This will outstanding in the fullness of time and age very well indeed. 2016-2035. **91.**

2011 Chinon “les Grézeaux”- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The les Grézeaux bottling from Mathieu Baudry hails from forty year-old vines and sees a bit of oak during its *elevage*. The 2011 is a young and very promising bottle, wafting from the glass in a very primary blend of cassis, dark berries, espresso, gravelly soil tones, a touch of barnyard, woodsmoke and a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very youthful, with a sappy core of fruit, outstanding soil signature, firm, ripe tannins and outstanding

length and grip on the chewy, palate-staining and youthful finish. This needs time, but it will be excellent. There is probably a touch of brett here that some folks may find off-putting, but to my palate it is quite minor and is not distracting in the least. 2020-2045. **92+**.

2011 Chinon “Beaumont”- Catherine and Pierre Breton

The 2011 Beaumont from the Bretons is noteworthy for its low octane in this vintage, coming in at a cool twelve percent alcohol and offers up a lovely, cool fruit aromatic blend of dark berries, cassis, a touch of violet, cigar ash, a touch of currant leaf and a lovely base of gravelly soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and really pure and finely-etched, with a fine core of fruit, a bit of nicely integrated, firm tannin and excellent length and grip on the transparent and impressively complex finish. This is still a puppy, but it has outstanding potential. 2017-2040. **92+**.

2011 Chinon- Château de Coulaine

The 2011 Chinon from Château de Coulaine is a very nice bottle in the making, which is quite tasty today (albeit, just a touch chewy), but will be even better with a year or two of bottle age. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classic mix of dark berries, gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke, fresh herbs, a touch of tree bark and a gentle topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is medium-full, nascently complex, with a fine core, ripe tannins, fine focus and very good length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is a lovely bottle of Chinon, but give it a bit of time in the cellar to really blossom. 2015-2030+. **89+**.

2011 Chinon “Cuvée Terroir”- Domaine Charles Joguet

The 2011 Chinon “Cuvée Terroir” from Domaine Charles Joguet is a young and fine bottle that needs a bit of decanting time to really blossom (as it is a bit reduced when first opened), but once it does come around, it is an impressive bottle of Chinon. The nose is a classic blend of dark berries, a bit of uncooked steak, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a touch of tree bark and a very subtle touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a good core, modest tannins and very good length and grip. This bottling is made from the domaine’s youngest vines and is designed to be drunk on the early side (though of course, with the balance to age, as this is a Joguet wine) and it is excellent with a bit of aeration to let it stretch its wings a bit. 2013-2023+. **89**.

2011 Chinon “Les Petites Roches”- Domaine Charles Joguet

The soils for the Petites Roches cuvée are riverbed soils that are a mix of gravel and limestone, with the vines averaging between thirty and thirty-five years of age and the 2011 is an excellent example of the vintage. The deep and classy bouquet offers up a youthful mélange of black cherries, a touch of dark berries, coffee bean, a lovely base of soil, a bit of charred wood and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and classically balanced, with a fine, suave (albeit primary) attack, a really lovely core of fruit, excellent focus and complexity and a long, moderately tannic and perfectly balanced finish. This is an absolutely quintessential bottle of young Chinon that will be superb in three or four years and should easily keep a couple of decades. 2016-2035. **92**.

2011 Chinon “Les Graves”- Béatrice et Pascal Lambert

The 2011 Chinon “Les Graves” from Béatrice et Pascal Lambert is a lovely bottle in the making, wafting from the glass in a mix of cassis, black cherries, juniper berry, woodsmoke, a bit of espresso and a nice base of gravelly soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and nicely round on the attack, with a good core, nascent complexity, moderate tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, chewy and well-balanced finish. This will be a fine bottle of Chinon

with three or four years of cellaring and should keep well for a couple of decades. Good juice. 2016-2030+. **89.**

2011 Chinon “Les Terrasses”- Béatrice et Pascal Lambert

The 2011 Chinon “Les Terrasses” from Béatrice et Pascal Lambert is an excellent young bottle of Chinon, with superb depth and outstanding balance and grip on the elegant palate. The fine bouquet is a youthful blend of dark berries, cigar smoke, incipient notes of chipotle peppers, a beautiful base of dark soil tones, a touch of fresh herbs and a hint of the gamebird to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave, with a lovely core, excellent focus and balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the young and utterly classic finish. The balance here is so fine that there is no problem drinking this wine today, but I would not hesitate to tuck it away in the cellar for a handful of years and really let its secondary layers of complexity emerge. This is an outstanding bottle of young Chinon! 2017-2035+. **92.**



2010 Chinon “l’Huisserie”- Domaine Philippe Alliet

Monsieur Alliet’s bottling from the vineyard of l’Huisserie only dates back to 2004, when he purchased this two hectare parcel. The vineyard lies next door to Domaine Joquet’s Chêne Vert plot, but these are still relatively young vines and Monsieur Alliet keeps the yields down to twenty-five hectares per hectare to try and compensate. The wine is aged in one-third new oak barrels from Bordeaux, with the remainder of the blend raised in older barrels and *demi-muids*.

The 2010 l'Huissierie delivers a fine and youthful bouquet of cherries, dark berries, menthol, a touch of cola, discreet soil tones, a bit of tree bark and a gentle framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a very good core, ripe, well-measured tannins, a fine base of soil and a long, primary and very promising finish. I really like the elegance of this young bottle of Chinon, which should be excellent with a handful of years of bottle age. 2016-2035+. **92.**

2010 Chinon "Coteau de Noire"- Domaine Philippe Alliet

The Coteau de Noire bottling from Philippe Alliet is aged entirely in new barrels and the 2010 is a bit marked by its new wood out of the blocks. The nose is deep and complex, but with the wood playing a starring role in its mélange of black cherries, cassis, a touch of tariness, toasty new wood, cigar ash, menthol and a base of dark soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. I really like the raw materials here, but the wood seems just a touch obtrusive at the present time and I suspect that this wine will always struggle just a bit to carry its new wood. This is a very good wine, but the same cuvée raised in one wine and two wine barrels might have been even more successful. Good juice, but I prefer the young vine bottling of l'Huissierie to this cuvée, as it has superior balance and soil signature, despite it hailing from younger vines. 2017-2030+. **91.**

2010 Chinon "Bonnaventure"- Château de Coulaine

This was the first vintage of the Bonnaventure bottling from Château de Coulaine, which is made from a selection of twenty-five-plus year-old vines, and the 2010 is a truly lovely bottle of Chinon. The wine is deep, young and very classy, offering up a superb bouquet of red and black cherries, menthol, tree bark, gravelly soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of nutskin and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core of sappy fruit, outstanding focus and balance, ripe, suave tannins and a very long, elegant and intensely flavored finish. This is a terrific bottle of young Chinon! 2013-2030+. **92.**

2010 Chinon "les Picasses"- Château de Coulaine (Etienne de Bonnaventure)

Loire Valley labeling these days really has me confused, as the label does not mention anywhere Château de Coulaine, but the US importer's website lists this wine as bottled by Château de Coulaine- which is owned and run by Etienne de Bonnaventure. You figure it out! In any case, the 2010 Picasses bottling from Monsieur de Bonnaventure is an excellent wine, wafting from the glass in a complex and classic mix of dark berries, charred wood, gravelly soil tones, espresso, a bit of new wood and a nice topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a very elegant rendition of this vineyard, with a lovely core of fruit, moderate, ripe tannins, lovely focus and nascent complexity, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is not a powerful example of the vintage, but it is a classic bottle of Chinon in the making and an outstanding success by any measure! 2018-2040+. **93.**

2010 Chinon "les Varennes du Grand Clos"- Domaine Charles Joguet

The 2010 vintage of the flagship bottling of les Varennes du Grand Clos from Domaine Joguet is outstanding, offering up a deep and youthfully complex nose of cassis, black cherries, coffee bean, gravelly soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of tree bark and just a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly classic in profile, with a suave core of fruit, ripe, nicely-integrated tannins, good acids and excellent length and grip on the pure and perfectly balanced finish. This is a beautiful bottle in the making, and though it is so well balanced that one can drink it while young, I would certainly wait several years to allow the

secondary layers of complexity to emerge on both the nose and palate. Fine juice. 2017-2035+. **93.**

2010 Chinon “Clos de la Dioterie”- Domaine Charles Jougnet

The 2010 Clos de la Dioterie is another excellent example of this vintage, as these seventy-five-plus year-old vines offer up a deep, pure and complex nose of cassis, sweet, dark berries, a touch of menthol, Cuban cigars, espresso, gravel and a lovely framing of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core of pure fruit, ripe, suave tannins, good acids, outstanding focus and great length and grip. This is a great vintage for this iconic bottling. Just give it some time to really blossom. 2020-2060+. **95.**

2009 Chinon “Les Perruches”- Béatrice et Pascal Lambert

The 2009 Les Perruches bottling from the Lamberts is a cool and classy example of this ripe vintage, with the wine only coming in at thirteen percent alcohol- which is quite moderate for the ‘09 vintage. The result is a wine that has all of the concentration of the best 2009s, but with truly exceptional precision and purity on both the nose and palate. The superb and still quite primary bouquet is a blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a bit of roasted game, gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke, currant leaf and a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and complex, with a superb core of pure fruit, excellent soil inflection, ripe, firm tannins and excellent length and grip on the young and chewy finish. High class juice in the making. 2018-2035+. **93.**

2009 Chinon “Cuvée Danaé”- Béatrice et Pascal Lambert

The Cuvée Danaé bottling from the Lamberts is made from a very old vine parcel in a limestone *terroir* in the family’s vineyards in Cravant-lès-Coteaux and is aged for a year in *demi-muids* prior to bottling. The 2009 is an outstanding bottle of young Chinon, wafting from the glass in a mix of pure cassis, black cherries, juniper berries, tobacco leaf, a fine base of soil, cigar smoke and a very well-done framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and beautifully focused, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance, firm tannins and superb length and grip on the long and tangy finish. There is just a touch of wood tannin poking through on the backend here today, though the wine has plenty of stuffing to eventually integrate these, but I would not plan to open a bottle of this lovely wine for at least another six or seven years and really let it come into its own. This is a superb bottle in the making. 2019-2035+. **93.**

2007 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The 2007 Chinon “les Picasses” from Domaine Olga Raffault is an outstanding example of the vintage that is quite elegant by the standards of a young Raffault Chinon, with nicely integrated tannins and superb potential. The deep and complex nose is just starting to move out of its primary stage of development and offers up scents of black cherries, cassis, gravelly soil tones, cigar ash, espresso and just a hint of the citrus zest that should arrive with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really beautifully focused, with lovely mid-palate depth, excellent detail, moderate tannins, good acids and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is not the most powerful vintage of les Picasses from Domaine Raffault that I have tasted, but I love its purity and superb balance and it may well be one of my favorite of the most recent vintages. While it is approachable today, a few more years of patience will be rewarded with a wine in full bloom. 2016-2035. **92+.**

Sparkling Vouvray and Montlouis

Vouvray Brut “la Dilettante” NV- Catherine et Pierre Breton

The non-vintage Vouvray Brut “la Dilettante” from Domaine Breton is a lovely example of its genre, offering up a bright and complex nose of quince, lemongrass, chalky minerality, bread dough and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and frothy, with good mid-palate depth, crisp acids and good focus and grip on the long and well-balanced finish. This is not overly complex, but it offers up plenty of personality and class. 2013-2020. **88.**

Sparkling Vouvray “Non Dosé” Brut NV- Domaine François Pinon

The “Non Dosé” Vouvray Brut NV from Domaine Pinon, in its current guise, is a pretty young wine that will be most appealing to Brut Zero lovers, as this young and snappy sparkler is bone dry. The nose is quite fine, offering up notes of tart quince, green apple, a touch of lanolin, chalky soil tones and a touch of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and brisk, with a good core, sound *mousse* and nascent complexity on the fairly long, soil-driven and youthfully austere finish. To my palate, this needs a year in the cellar to round off and blossom a bit, but for extreme fans of bone dry bubbly, this is probably right up their alley already and my score may seem a bit conservative. 2014-2025. **86+?**

Sparkling Vouvray Brut NV- Domaine François Pinon

The newest bottling of the Pinon Vouvray Brut NV that is finished off with a bit of *dosage* is far more giving structurally out of the blocks and easier to appreciate. The bouquet is bright and still quite primary, as it offers up scents of apple, quince, a gentle touch of honeycomb, warm bread and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still plenty zesty, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and good, solid length and grip on the snappy finish. The *dosage* here does a nice job of buffering the serious girdle of acidity here and I much prefer the balance of this bottling. 2013-2025. **88+.**

2011 Sparkling Montlouis “les Pions”- Ludovic Chanson

The vintage date on the les Pions bottling from Ludovic Chanson does not appear on the front label, but on the back label. This is a lovely bottle of sparkling chenin blanc, with all the elegance of the *terroir* of Montlouis in evidence on the nose, but with a snappy and youthful structure on the palate that would like a year or two in the cellar to really blossom. The bouquet is really fine, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, quince, bee pollen, bread dough, chalky soil tones and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a fine core, reasonably refined *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the youthfully complex finish. This is not a bad drink today, but will be decidedly better with a year or two of bottle age. 2015-2025+. **89+.**

Vouvray

In the last piece on the Loire in Issue 45, I reported on bottles of 2002 Domaine Huët Demi-Secs out of my own cellar that seemed to be showing the first signs of premox. Here I have notes on bottles from a different source that were absolutely pristine and showed no signs of undue advancement and, in fact, were absolutely stellar and which I tasted last spring. Upon reflection, it seems quite clear that these bottles of the 2002s were stored in a cooler warehouse prior to being purchased by my friend and are representative of where the wines should be in their evolutions. My bottles, purchased much later, after spending several years in a distributor's warehouse (whose storage conditions I have no knowledge of, but surmise were a bit warmer than my own cellar would be), are (sadly) more advanced and do seem to be showing signs of premox (shortness on the finish, lack of grip and quite advanced flavors and aromatics). I posted

notes on those in the last issue, but thought I should include notes on these pristine bottles tasted about a year ago. Noël Pinguet chose to use a much lower than typical sulfur regimen with his 2002s, which may be one of the reasons that my bottles are showing some signs of advancement after (what I presume to have been) warmer storage, and it is highly likely that even the most perfectly stored bottles of 2002s from Domaine Huët will evolve quicker than the customary time capsule method of most other vintages from the estate. My gut instincts tell me that even those with perfectly stored bottles from day one should still consider their 2002s to be an atypical vintage from the domaine and not plan on burying them in the cellar for future generations to enjoy at age fifty, as it seems probable with the lower sulfur regimen used at Domaine Huët in 2002 will make this one vintage from the estate that does not stand the long test of time. However, as I noted in Issue 45, the more advanced bottles of 2002 are still drinking beautifully right now and are certainly not collapsing (just alarmingly forward for relatively young Huët wines!), but this will be a vintage that needs close monitoring over the coming few years. Given that Monsieur Pinguet chose to use a low sulfur regimen for his 2002s, there is no reason to assume that the apparent premo in my bottles of '02s are indicative that other vintages from Domaine Huët will also have difficulties, as this premo may be the result solely of the low SO₂ levels used here in the 2002 vintage and may not affect any other vintages from this era.

2012 Vouvray “la Coulée d’Argent” Sec- Domaine Bourillon d’Orléans

The 2012 “Coulée d’Argent” Sec from Domaine Bourillon d’Orléans is a pretty example of the vintage, but seeing as it is bottled under a plastic cork, it will need to be drunk over the next year or two. The bouquet is quite stylish in its mélange of apple, quince, bee pollen, a touch of chalky soil tones, incipient notes of honeycomb and a dollop of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, balanced and fairly soft for a young Vouvray Sec (particularly from the 2012 vintage), with a lovely core of fruit, moderate acids and fine length and grip on the fairly complex finish. There are good raw materials here, so I cannot understand for the life of me why this wine was bottled under plastic cork! Drink soon. 2013-2014+? **88.**

2012 Vouvray “la Bourdonnerie” Demi-Sec- Domaine Bourillon d’Orléans

The 2012 la Bourdonnerie from Bourillon d’Orléans is really quite sweet for a Demi-Sec bottling, and I suspect this could have been bottled as a Moelleux bottling. The nose is very floral and esthery in complexion, offering up scents of peach, honeysuckle, gentle chalkiness, sweet quince, white flowers and incipient notes of the honey to come. On the palate the wine is full, sweet and nicely focused, with a good core, fairly gentle acids for the vintage, with nice complexity and a long, fairly sweet and wide open finish of good length and bounce. There is not much backend grip here, but for near-term drinking, this is a very tasty bottle- albeit, a bit on the sweeter side for a Demi-Sec. 2013-2018+? **90.**

2011 Vouvray “Silex Noir” Demi-Sec- Domaine François Pinon

The 2011 Vouvray “Silex Noir” from François Pinon is a pretty wine from a difficult vintage. The bouquet is bright and complex, offering up scents of apple, honeycomb, a touch of lanolin, a nice base of flinty soil and a delicate touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and pretty modest in terms of complexity, with a solid core, sound, framing acids and a long, wide open finish that suggests this wine will need to be drunk in its relative youth. It is a good effort from 2011, but it is not going to make anyone forget a wine like the 2009 Silex Noir! 2013-2016+? **87.**

2011 Vouvray “Les Trois Argiles” Demi-Sec- Domaine François Pinon

The Demi-Sec tag does not appear anywhere on the label here, but the wine is definitely in that category and is really a lovely example of the vintage. The wine offers up a lovely nose of apple, sweet quince, a dollop of beeswax, honeycomb, gentle notes of orange peel and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and wide open in personality, with a fine core, crisp, framing acids, lovely complexity and very good length and grip on the focused and classy finish. I have to give the slight nod to the Les Trois Argiles over the Silex Noir bottling this year, as this wine is just a bit more complete on the palate and a tad longer on the finish. A fine result from a challenging year! 2013-2018. **88.**

2010 Vouvray “la Dilettante”- Catherine et Pierre Breton

The 2010 Vouvray “la Dilettante” bottling from the Bretons is a demi-sec- though it makes no mention of this on the front or back labels. The wine is really quite lovely, offering up a bright and classic nose of pineapple, quince, honeycomb, chalky soil tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and pretty complex, with a nice core, ripe acids and fine focus and grip on the long, well-balanced and wide open finish. This is made to be tasty right out of the blocks and it most assuredly is that, with the structure and balance to age nicely for a decade or so. Good, quaffable Vouvray. 2013-2023. **89+.**

2005 Vouvray “Cuvée Botrytis”- Domaine François Pinon (half bottle)

The 2005 Vouvray “Cuvée Botrytis” from Domaine François Pinon is a splendid wine offers up plenty of noble rot in its aromatic blend of peach, tangerine, honey, chalky soil tones, still a touch of lanolin, orange blossoms and incipient notes of the leather to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite adolescent, with just a whisper of the dustiness that Vouvray can show in its awkward stage, but with a great core, bright acids and outstanding focus and balance on the long, complex and zesty finish. This will be a great wine, but it is still just a few years away from shaking off that awkward period of adolescence and really reaching for transcendence! If one drinks this wine today, it is in the very, very good camp, but the real fireworks will not start for a few more years. 2016-2050. **94+.**

2002 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Non-Greffé Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

The Non-Greffé bottling of Demi-Sec from Le Haut Lieu is made up of the young vines from the vineyard that were planted ungrafted on French rootstocks, and prior to this tasting, I had no idea that this wine was ever made. Interesting, it is more closed than the regular bottling (did Monsieur Pinguet use more sulfur for this one or is this just typical of ungrafted vines?) and offers up scents of apple, quince, chalk dust, a touch of Chablis-like straw tones, citrus peel and lanolin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and quite elegant, but with less mid-palate depth than the regular bottling. The finish is long, crisp and complex, but the apparent benefits of the ungrafted, French rootstocks here seem to have been offset by the young vine nature of the bottling. This is still a very fine bottle of Vouvray, but not in the same league as the regular bottling of Le Haut Lieu Demi-Sec. 2017-2030+? **92.**

2002 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2002 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Demi-Sec from Domaine Huët is a beautiful wine that is drinking very well at the present time, but shows no signs of any unexpected advancement on either the nose or palate. The superb bouquet offers up scents of fresh apricot, quince, a hint of honeycomb, wool, orange blossoms and a beautifully complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and racy, with a superb core of fruit, great focus and superb length and grip on the poised and complex finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Demi-Sec that has now entered its plateau of maturity. 2012-2030+? **94.**

2002 Vouvray “Le Mont” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

I have a lot of this wine and the Clos du Bourg Demi-Sec in my cellar and it kills me to think that my bottles are going to need drinking up over the short term, as these two wines are clearly two of the greatest white wines I have ever had the pleasure to taste! The 2002 Le Mont Demi-Sec soars from the glass in a stunning aromatic constellation of orange, sweet quince, brilliantly complex minerality, incipient notes of honeycomb, orange zest and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and racy, with bottomless depth at the core, laser-like focus, gem-like brilliance and simply stunning length and grip on the complex and so magically elegant finish. This is both more refined and more complex than the superb 2002 Le Haut Lieu Demi-Sec! 2012-2030+? **96.**

1989 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux Première Trie- Domaine Huët

It has been several years since I last crossed paths with an open bottle of Domaine Huët's 1989 Le Mont Moelleux Première Trie, and the wine seems not to have been touched at all by the passing of time! The absolutely beautiful nose is still quite youthful in its blend of orange, pineapple, sweet quince, barley sugar, a very complex base of soil, honey and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and displays stunning mid-palate depth, with crisp acids, flawless focus and balance, magical complexity and grip and stunning backend intensity on the very, very long finish. As I have said repeatedly about the 1989 vintage at Domaine Huët, this is probably the single greatest year here for these otherworldly Vouvrais since 1947! This wine is totally approachable today, but there is so much more to come over the coming decades (take a look below at the note on the 1959), that unless one has a really good-sized pile of bottles of this wine in the cellar, I would be strongly inclined to not touch a bottle for at least another ten to twelve years! 2013-2085. **96.**

1959 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët (reconditioned at domaine)

The 1959 Le Haut Lieu Demi-Sec is a beautiful bottle of Vouvray, wafting from the glass in a complex and very floral superb blend of quince, lilacs, orange blossoms, lanolin, chalky soil tones, lemon peel and a touch of pink grapefruit. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and completely vibrant, with a great core, still bright acids, excellent focus and grip on the very long, pure and now, fairly dry finish. This is probably a bit younger from its re-corking, topping up and sulfur adjustment than a bottle would be that was still on its original cork, but it is a lovely wine that seems no worse for having been updated in the cellars. 2012-2060. **93+.**

1959 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Moelleux Première Trie- Domaine Huët

The 1959 Le Haut Lieu Première Trie is an utterly brilliant wine at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability and one of the greatest examples I have ever had the pleasure to taste from this vineyard. The magical nose soars in a mélange of orange, clover honey, apricot, a touch of carob, exotic spice tones redolent of tamarind and cinnamon, beautifully complex soil tones, new leather and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and gloriously complex, with perfect focus and balance, a great core, bright acids and simply stunning length and grip. A timeless masterpiece! 2012-2060+. **98.**

1959 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux Première Trie- Domaine Huët

In contrast to the 1959 Le Haut Lieu Première Trie, which is at its absolute summit of peak drinking, the 1959 Le Mont Première Trie is still a bit on the young side! The bouquet is deep and complex, but still a touch reserved in its mix of orange, apricot, new leather, smoke, a touch of caramel, heather, citrus peel and a complex base of soil nuances. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and a bit reserved stylistically, with a rock solid core, bright acids, exceptional focus and grip and a very, very long, vibrant and complex finish. This probably has

even a touch more mid-palate concentration than the wide open Le Haut Lieu Première Trie, and perhaps with more bottle age it will catch or even surpass that magical wine. But, right now, one has to give a very, very slight nod to the Le Haut Lieu- though the '59 Le Mont Première Trie is a brilliant wine by any stretch of the imagination. 2020-2075. **96+**.

1959 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Moelleux Première Trie- Domaine Huët

The 1959 Clos du Bourg Première Trie is another absolutely brilliant wine, soaring from the glass in a vibrant and stunningly complex mélange of heather, orange peel, fresh apricot, carob, sweet browned butter, honey, a beautifully refined base of soil and a bit of leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and bottomless, with a rock solid core of fruit, stunning soil inflection, brisk acids, laser-like focus and haunting length and grip on the brilliantly complex and utterly refined finish. This is another absolutely monumental bottle of Vouvray at its absolute peak of maturity- yet, with still decades and decades of life still ahead of it! 2012-2075. **98.**

1955 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Sec- Domaine Huët

The 1955 Le Haut Lieu Sec bottling is a fine wine that is probably at its apogee and yet shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon and still has a minimum of thirty or forty more years of excellent drinking ahead of it. The beautiful nose offers up a deep and slightly reserved mix of tart orange, plantain, citrus peel, cotton, chalky soil tones and a topnote of straw. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and still quite structured, with a fine core, excellent focus and a long, snappy and quite bone-dry finish. There is an edge of austerity to the '55 Le Haut Lieu Sec that will probably never quite leave the wine, but there is admirable complexity and breed here lurking behind the rather stern, structural elements and this wine may yet blossom into a more generous format with further bottle age! Kind of funny to be writing an observation such as this about a wine that is already fifty-seven years old! 2012-2075. **90+?**

Montlouis

2011 Montlouis “les Cabotines” Sec- Domaine Ludovic Chanson

The 2011 Montlouis “les Cabotines” Sec from Ludovic Chanson is a very pretty wine that beautifully captures the elegance inherent in Montlouis. The nose is a complex blend of apple, white peach, chalky soil tones, lanolin, spring flowers and a touch of bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite dry, with a good core, crisp acids and very good length and grip on the wide open finish. The wine dips just a touch on the backend (the only nod evident to the difficult growing season of 2011), but this is a very well-made wine that will offer up lovely drinking over the next six to eight years. I cannot wait to taste an example from Monsieur Chanson from a less trying vintage! 2013-2020. **88.**

2011 Montlouis “les Pêchers” Sec Tendre- Domaine Ludovic Chanson

The 2011 Montlouis “les Pêchers” from Monsieur Chanson is labeled as “Sec Tendre” (first time I have ever seen this term!) and which I assume is a step between Sec and Demi-Sec, as the wine has just a touch more residual sweetness on the palate than the les Cabotines bottling. This too, is a lovely wine, offering up scents of white peach, bee pollen, a delicate touch of citrus zest, a lovely base of chalkiness, white lilies and hints of the honeycomb to come with a bit more age. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and filigreed, with a lovely core, very good acids and fine focus and balance on the long, complex and classy finish. The touch more residual sweetness on the backend fills in nicely the slight dip on the backend that is evident in the les Cabotines bottling, without really making the wine anymore sweet! A lovely result. 2013-2020. **89.**



White Wines of the Touraine and Côteaux du Loir

2012 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc- Puzelat-Bonhomme

The 2012 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc from Puzelat-Bonhomme is really a very pretty and succulent glass of sauvignon blanc, but it is sealed up under a plastic cork and will need drinking over the next twelve months. The bright bouquet wafts from the glass with loads of personality in its mélange of gooseberry, orange, fresh-cut grass, a touch of chalky soil and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, reasonably crisp and quite generous on the attack, with lovely fruit, a good core and fine length and grip on the vibrant finish. Good juice 2013-2014. **88.**

2012 Le P'tit Blanc du Tue-Boeuf

The Le P'tit Blanc du Tue-Boeuf is a blend of sauvignon blanc from Cheverny and Menu-Pineau from the Touraine and the vintage is not indicated on either the front label, but included in the code of "LTB12" on the back label. The wine is quite lovely on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a mix of tart orange, sweet quince, flint, gentle grassiness, citrus peel and smoky overtones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with crisp acids, excellent focus and intensity and superb length and grip on the really impressive finish. This has to be one of the best values out there for a complex, dry white wine from the Loire. Great juice. 2013-2014. **89.**

2012 Sauvignon Blanc- Hervé Villemade

The 2012 Sauvignon Blanc from Hervé Villemade is a lovely example of the vintage that seems to hail from flinty soils. The deep and bright nose offers up scents of pink grapefruit, tangerine, damp grass, a lovely signature of silex, orange peel and smoke. On the palate the wine

is fullish, crisp and shows off fine mid-palate depth, with good focus and grip and a long, still fairly youthful finish that shows just an edge of youthful white pepper on the backend today. This offers up a lot of depth and nascent complexity for its price and will be even better with a few months of bottle age to allow it to fully blossom from behind its structure. A great value. 2013-2015+. **88+**.

2011 Vieilles Vignes “Éparses” (Coteaux-du-Loir)- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)

The 2011 Vieilles Vignes “Éparses” from Domaine de Bellivière is produced from several scattered parcels of fifty-something year-old vines in different villages (some of which are not entitled to the Jasnières AOC), so this superb wine is only entitled to the Coteaux-du-Loir appellation. The 2011 is stellar, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of fresh apricot, orange, honeycomb, lovely, chalky soil tones (there is less clay in several of these vineyards than is typical in Jasnières) and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and racy, with a great core, superb focus and grip and a long, youthful and complex finish. This is probably close to a demi-sec in terms of residual sugar, but the acids are really snappy this year and the overall impression (at least at this point in time) is of a dry, soil-driven and very racy wine. Superb juice. 2013-2030. **91**.

2011 Jasnières “Calligramme”- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)

The Calligramme bottling of Jasnières from Domaine de Bellivière is produced from fifty-plus year-old chenin vines and the wine typically will run in style from Sec to Demi-Sec, depending on what Mother Nature gives Monsieur Nicolas in any given year. The 2011 is quite dry, but deep, complex and racy, with great depth and nascent complexity. The bouquet is a fine blend of sweet quince, a touch of tangerine, citrus oils, a beautiful base of soil and just a whisper of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and cut and a very long, soil-driven and intensely flavored finish. This is a really lovely bottle of wine that is already approachable today, but seems likely to have no difficulties aging ten to fifteen years. I have to give this lovely wine a slight nod over the old vine Éparses bottling, due to the more precise expression of soil here. 2013-2025+? **92+**.

2011 Existe en Blanc- Domaine l’Oubliée (Xavier Courant)

This is not officially a 2011 vintage wine, as I am sure that chenin blanc in the regions of Bourgueil is not an AC wine, so the vintage is indicated by a code of “Lchenin11” on the side of the label. The wine is grown in a combination of clay and silex soils and offers up a deep and very vibrant nose of tart orange, sweet quince, paraffin, a lovely base of flinty soil tones, candied lime peel and a bit of lanolin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and long on personality, with good, framing acids, a fine core and just a whisper of backend sweetness on the very long and soil-driven finish. This seems like a wine to drink in its relative youth, but it has such lovely balance that it may prove to be longer-lived than I anticipate. Good juice. 2013-2015+? **89**.

Red Wines of the Touraine- Primarily Gamay, Pinot Noir and Pinot d’Aunis

2012 Poivre et Sel- Olivier Lemasson

The Poivre et Sel bottling from Olivier Lemasson is made up of Pinot d’aunis, but it is not recognized anymore as an officially allowed varietal in his appellation, so the wine is sold under its proprietary name. The 2012 version comes in at a svelte 11.5 percent alcohol, but it delivers plenty of intensity of flavor and complexity in this small-scaled package. The lovely and youthful bouquet is a blend of black cherries, fresh herbs, a touch of black pepper, notes of chicory and a smoky topnote redolent of bonfires. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and

complex, with lovely focus and balance, good, but not great depth, gentle tannins and a long, intensely flavored and very persistent finish. This delivers a lot of impact for its low octane level and should drink nicely for four or five years. 2013-2017. **90.**

2012 Mon Cher Gamay- Noëlla Morantin

The 2012 Mon Cher Gamay from Noëlla Morantin comes in at a cool and lean twelve percent alcohol and should be the perfect cure for those afflicted with excess alcohol in their red wines from other regions. The nose is lovely, wafting from the glass in a bright blend of cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil, a touch of nutskin, herb tones and a faint whiff of tree bark. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, young and tangy, with zesty acids, lovely focus, a fine soil signature and very good length and grip on the youthful finish. My sample still had a touch of CO₂ in it that needed a bit of decanting to blow off, but once this is accomplished, the wine offers up impressive intensity of flavor and mid-core sappiness for such a low octane and svelte wine. A lovely middleweight- but, don't forget to decant it and let it blossom! 2013-2018. **89.**

2012 Touraine Pinot Noir- Thierry Puzelat

This bottling is one of the fine *négociant* offerings from Thierry Puzelat, and the 2012 version shows good promise, but will need a bit of time to blossom and lose a bit of youthful weediness. There is good depth on the nose and impressive mid-palate stuffing here for this Touraine pinot, but also a bit of structure that will want some cellaring. The bouquet is a complex blend of black cherries, dark berries, cola, woodsmoke, incipient notes of the *sous bois* to come with just a bit of bottle age and the aforementioned fresh herb tones that turn mostly towards thyme with extended breathing. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and nascently complex, with a good core of fruit, lovely transparency, very good focus and balance and fine length and grip on the moderately chewy and intensely flavored finish. This will be very, very good in two or three years, but it needs that time to unwind. 2016-2030. **89+.**

2012 Touraine “La Tesnière” Pineau d’Aunis- Thierry Puzelat

The La Tesnière bottling is a one hundred percent pinot d’aunis cuvée that Monsieur Puzelat sources from a fine old vineyard near Clos Roche Blanche. The 2012 comes in at a cool and classy twelve percent alcohol and offers up a superb and quite complex bouquet of red and black cherries, bonfires, a bit of black pepper, a lovely base of dark soil tones, dried oak leaves, tree bark, a touch of orange peel and chicory. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and complex, with a good core of fruit, just a whisper of tannin, good acids and lovely depth and grip on the long and classy finish. I really like this wine today and imagine that it will be even tastier with a year or two of bottle age. High class Pineau d’Aunis. 2013-2025+. **92.**

R-12- Olivier Lemasson

I assume that the R-12 bottling from Monsieur Lemasson hails from the 2012 vintage, but I am not certain of the blend that this wine is produced from. In any case, the wine comes in at 11.5 percent octane and offers up a fine bouquet of dark berries, pepper, a touch of cardamom, woodsmoke, a lovely base of dark soil tones and tree bark. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with still a bit of CO₂, a solid core and a long, slightly chewy and youthful finish. This is a good, honest bottle of Loire red that is long on depth and stuffing, but also a touch on the rustic side. A year in the cellar may polish up the backend a bit, and I would be inclined to give it some time in the cellar and let it blossom. 2014-2020+? **87+.**

2011 Gama Sutra- Olivier Lemasson

Olivier Lemasson's Gama Sutra bottling hails from a plot of nearly ninety year-old gamay vines in a well-situated vineyard that one of his friends in the area owns. I am not really positive that this is the 2011 vintage, as the only indication of vintage these days is some very fine script on the right side of the label that says "LGam 11", which I assume is good enough for a vintage labeling! The wine is pretty ripe by Monsieur Lemasson's standards, coming in at thirteen percent, and offers up a deep and youthful nose of cassis, a bit of barnyard, coffee bean, lovely soil tones, a touch of pepper, fresh herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off fine mid-palate concentration, with good acids, fine focus and just a bit of backend, youthful barnyard (touch of brett?) on the long and well-balanced finish. I really like this wine for its complexity and intensity of flavor, and though it is probably not entirely clean, there is a lot of personality to be found here in the glass. 2013-2020. **89.**

2011 Clos Roche Blanche "Cuvée Pif"

The 2011 version of Clos Roche Blanche's "Cuvée Pif" (a malbec and cabernet franc composition) is superb, offering up great purity and intensity of flavor in a low octane, very civilized twelve percent alcohol level. The bouquet is a superb blend of dark berries, black cherries, a bit of hickory smoke, dark soil tones, espresso and cola. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and balance, a bit of firm tannin and excellent length and grip on the very promising finish. I would opt for tucking this away in the cellar for a year or two and let the tannins fall away a bit, as the wine will really drink beautifully once it has had a chance to soften a bit. Fine juice and (as usual) a great value. 2015-2025+. **90.**

2011 Patapon- Natalie and Christian Chaussard

As readers may recall from past Loire features, the Patapon cuvée from Natalie and Christian Chaussard is a carbonically macerated pinot d'aunis that is designed for early drinking, but the 2011 is going to need a bit of bottle age to blossom. The 2011 version is very nice aromatically and very young, wafting from the glass in a youthful blend of cherries, plenty of fresh herbs, tree bark, a touch of white pepper, a touch of coriander seed and vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is fullish, tight and tangy, with a respectable core, a fair bit of tannin and a long, tightly-knit and snappy finish. I think this wine will be lovely with some time to soften up in the cellar, but this is rather youthfully snippy out of the blocks. 2014-2020. **87+.**

2011 Gamay "La Probilière"- Puzelat-Bonhomme

The 2011 La Probilière from Puzelat-Bonhomme is a lovely bottle of gamay, jumping from the glass in a vibrant blend of pomegranate, black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of red curry, fresh-ground coffee, a touch of herb tones, a fine base of soil and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, sappy and really well-balanced, with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, bright and beautifully balanced finish. This is a young wine that really could use a year or two in the cellar to really blossom structurally, but, it is so well-balanced out of the blocks that I can imagine that many folks will very happily drink it right out of the blocks. Fine juice. 2014-2020. **90.**

Red Wines of the Touraine- Primarily Côt

2012 Touraine Rouge "La Butte"- Clos du Tue-Boeuf

The 2012 Touraine Rouge "La Butte" from Clos du Tue-Boeuf is an excellent wine, offering up a bright and sappy bouquet of black cherries, woodsmoke, a bit of tree bark, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, fresh thyme, incipient autumnal tones redolent of dried

oak leaves and a touch of walnut. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very intensely flavored, with a lovely core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance, modest tannins, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the really bouncy finish. A superb wine. 2013-2023+. **90.**

2012 KO “In Côt We Trust”- Puzelat-Bonhomme

Côt is the local name for malbec, and Messieurs Puzelat and Bonhomme have come up with a very witty name for this bottling for those who are a little challenged pronouncing the Loire Valley name of Malbec. The 2012 vintage of “In Côt We Trust” is another quite low octane wine, coming in at a cool 11.5 percent, but offers up plenty of stuffing at its lower ripeness level. The fine bouquet is a black fruity blend of dark berries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and a nice touch of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and beautifully focused, with no shortage of intensity, lovely transparency, just a bit of backend tannin and excellent length and grip on the bouncy and the beautifully balanced finish. High class, low wattage, juice! 2013-2020. **91.**

2011 Touraine Rouge “La Guerrerie”- Clos du Tue-Boeuf

The La Guerrerie bottling from Clos du Tue-Boeuf is made up of seventy percent côt (malbec) and thirty percent gamay, and it is quite light in color and octane in this vintage, tipping the scales at a cool and racy 11.1 percent alcohol. Nevertheless, despite its quite modest ripeness in terms of sugar concentration, the wine is not short on personality on either the nose or palate, as it offers up a bright and vibrant bouquet of cherries, woodsmoke, coffee, a touch of white pepper, lovely soil tones and a nice topnote of fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and intensely flavored, with modest tannins, tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the complex and impressively long finish. There is just a touch of backend VA here that blows off if one decants the wine, which is recommended. This is really a very classy bottle of zingy red wine that many folks will love, but for those weaned on low acid, high alcohol, fat and easy red wines, this will probably seem a bit too electrified on the palate to really delight. This low fat and high class wine clearly has the structure to keep up to a decade and may be even tastier with a year or two of bottle age. A high wire act that works just fine for my palate! 2013-2023. **89.**

Cheverny and Cour-Cheverny Blanc

The white wines from Cheverny are a wonderful mosaic of the Loire in general, as they can include varying percentages of grapes such as chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, sauvignon gris and Romarantin. In fact, wines made solely from the local grape of Romarantin is given its own appellation here: Cour-Cheverny. The vineyards are located on the outskirts of Blois, about halfway between the cities of Tours and Orléans. In my experience, most bottlings of Cheverny blanc will be generally based on sauvignon blanc, with the other varieties playing supporting roles, but there are a few bottlings that are one hundred percent Romarantin and which may well be amongst the very best whites made in this region of the Loire. Cheverny blanc offers impressive value, and for the intrepid, there are some amazingly fine bargains to be had here, not to mention some very serious and accomplished producers.

2012 Cheverny “le Petit Chambord”- Domaine François Cazin

The 2012 Cheverny “le Petit Chambord” from François Cazin is really a pretty example of the vintage, offering up a ripe and soil-driven bouquet of green apple, tart orange, lime zest, a complex base of chalky-stony soil, spring flowers and just a hint of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and transparent, with a good core, crisp

acids and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex and soil-driven finish. This is very good today, but year in the cellar will allow its secondary layers of complexity to unfold and the wine will be even better. 2013-2020. **90.**



2011 Cour-Cheverny “Cuvée Renaissance” Moelleux Domaine François Cazin

This is the first sweeter-styled Cour-Cheverny I have had the pleasure to taste and I really like how the residual sweetness works with the minerality that Romarantin picks up with such ease. The bouquet offers up a fine mélange of gentle pineapple, pear, paraffin, a hint of custard, spring flowers, a very delicate touch of fresh nutmeg and a nice base of minerally soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and very gently glazed with botrytis, with a superb core, fine acids, lovely focus and balance and a long, complex and modestly sweet finish. This seems likely to drink best in its relative youth (not that I have any experience at all with botrytized wines made out of Romarantin!), as I really love the balance and freshness the wine delivers on the palate today. It would make a really elegant match with a cheese course at the end of the meal, but it is certainly not very sweet and I would not classify it as a dessert wine (as it is more demi-sec in style). Lovely juice. 2013-2018? **91.**

2011 Cheverny “Frileuse”- Le Clos du Tue Boeuf

The Frileuse bottling from Le Clos du Tue Boeuf is made up of one third each sauvignon blanc, chardonnay and sauvignon gris. The wine is really very lovely in 2011, offering up a deep, complex and wide open bouquet of fresh pineapple, apple, lanolin, orange peel, a gentle hint of

grassiness and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with a good core, lovely complexity and very fine length and grip on the bright and soil-driven finish. The acids here frame the wine beautifully today, but I do not get the strong sense of structure in reserve here, and I would opt for drinking this delicious wine over the next couple of years. 2013-2015. **89.**

2010 Cour-Cheverny “le Petit Chambord”- Domaine François Cazin

The 2010 Cour-Cheverny from François Cazin is a beautiful bottle of Romarantin that has developed lovely, secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate and is drinking at its apogee today. The deep and complex nose offers up a superb blend of pineapple, gently candied limepeel, beeswax, a lovely base of soil, a touch of wild fennel and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and bright, with a fine core, impressive complexity, bright acids, excellent grip and superb soil signature on the very long and focused finish. I really love this wine for current drinking, but it shows no signs of slowing down any time soon and probably has at least another four or five years of lovely drinking ahead of it. A superb wine. 2013-2018+? **92.**

Cheverny Rouge

Typically made from a blend of pinot noir and gamay, Cheverny rouge can be one of the best values to be had in the entire Loire Valley, which is saying something, given how many great values are to be found from this region. I very much love the style of the best producers of Cheverny rouge, which I find more complex and complete wines than the vast majority of Bourgogne rouge bottlings- many of which cost more than the top examples of Cheverny rouge. For those intrepid enough to try a few of these wines, there are some absolutely stellar bottles to be discovered and some very serious drinking to be enjoyed at bargain prices.

2012 Cheverny Rouge “Rouillon”- Le Clos du Tue Boeuf

The single vineyard bottling from the Rouillon vineyard is the inverse blend from the basic Cheverny rouge at Clos de Tue Boeuf, as it is comprised of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent gamay. Here the vines are significantly older than in the regular bottling (which I did not see from the 2012 vintage), hailing from a very fine locale. The wine is quite lovely aromatically, wafting from the glass in a mix of pomegranate, vinesmoke, white pepper, a fine base of soil tones, mustard seed and a bit of chicory. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, succulent and bouncy, with a nice sappiness at the core, tangy acids, a bit of tannin and a long, youthfully herbal finish. There is a bit of pyrazine on the backend here that will put off those who are sensitive to this characteristic, but there is a lot here to like in terms of complexity and intensity of flavor for those of us that do not mind a bit of *herbacité* in their young reds. 2013-2020+. **89.**

2012 Cheverny Rouge “La Caillière”- Le Clos du Tue Boeuf

In contrast to the Cheverny rouge from the Rouillon vineyard (see above), the La Caillière vineyard is planted to one hundred percent pinot noir, all of which are old vines and raised in big old *foudres*. The 2012 is a riper wine than the 2011, coming in at a very civilized 12.5 percent alcohol, but it really shows its youth at the present time and needs a year or two of bottle age to really start to blossom. My sample was a touch reductive and needed to be decanted to blossom, but eventually delivers a fine bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of meatiness, bonfires, espresso, dark soil tones, fresh herb tones and incipient notes of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully weedy, with a nice touch of

sappiness at the core, modest tannins, good acids and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This needs a year or two to allow its weedy backend flavors to morph into something more interesting, which I am quite confident that they will if given some time in the cellar. 2015-2025+. **89+**.

2012 Cheverny Rouge “La Gravotte”- Clos du Tue Boeuf

Like the La Caillière bottling from Clos du Tue Boeuf, the La Gravotte vineyard is planted entirely to pinot noir. The 2011 is pretty modestly ripe, coming in at 11.5 percent alcohol in this vintage, and of all the low octane bottlings of Cheverny I tasted from Clos de Tue Boeuf in preparation for this report, and out of the blocks it is a bit tight and weedy, but blossoms impressively with breathing. At first blush, the nose is not the strongest aspect of this wine, but it gains nicely in attractiveness as it gets some air and eventually offers up a fine blend of red and black cherries, lovely soil tones, celery seed, woodsmoke, a bit of bergamot and fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and well-balanced, with a good core, fine focus and grip, impressive complexity and a bit of tannin perking up the long, palate-staining and classy finish. When first popped and poured, I was disappointed with this wine, but it only took about ten minutes in the glass for the wine to start to show its true colors and it is really quite lovely if treated with a bit of patience. Fine juice. 2013-2025. **90+**.

2011 Cheverny Rouge “La Caillière”- Le Clos du Tue Boeuf

The 2011 La Caillière is a cool and classy example of the vintage, coming in at 11.6 percent and offering up a youthful and complex nose of cherries, red berries, vinesmoke, a lovely base of soil, fresh thyme, touch of mustard seed and coffee. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and impressively sappy at the core (particularly for under twelve percent alcohol!), with tangy acids, fine focus and grip and a long, youthful and well-balanced finish. This is going to be a really good bottle of pinot noir with a year or two of bottle age and probably will drink well for at least a decade. A great value! 2014-2025. **90+**.

2011 Cheverny “les Ardilles” Rouge- Hervé Villemade

I notice that Monsieur Villemade’s labels no longer contain any reference to Domaine du Moulin for his les Ardilles bottling, but as this is the family domaine, I assume this is just to have a bit of variation in the labels of different cuvées. This wine is comprised of a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent gamay. The wine offers up a lovely nose of dark berries, black cherries, charred wood, chicory and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and complex, with a lovely signature of soil, a good core, fine focus, and good length and grip on the surprisingly chewy backend. I really like this wine, but there is a bit of volatile acidity when it is first opened and the wine should be served from a decanter to let this blow off. 2013-2020+. **88+**.

Menetou-Salon and Quincy

2012 Menetou-Salon “les Morogues”- Domaine Henri Pellé (screwcap)

I was very disappointed to see that my sample bottle of the les Morogues bottling from Henri Pellé showed up under screwcap, as this has long been one of my two favorite bottlings of Menetou-Salon (the other being the Pellé family’s bottling of Les Blanchais). The 2012 les Morogues shows no signs of reduction on the nose, as it offers up a bright and high-toned blend of gooseberry, lime, cut grass, understated notes of chalky soil and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is already showing a bit of screwcap disorientation, with a bit less core and a slightly pinched and very short finish uncharacteristically in evidence. The wine is medium-full, moderately crisp and nicely focused, but without much mid-palate depth and a finish that simply

vanishes from the face of the earth on the backend. I have been drinking and serving the wines of Henri Pellé since the mid-1990s and feel I have a good background on their consistent excellence. That said, the 2012 les Morogues under screwcap is one of the most disappointing wines I have ever tasted from the estate, and it is my impression that the closure plays a factor, as this is a fine vintage on the eastern end of the Loire. This is okay for near-term drinking, as it is still aromatically very clean, but is not in the league of any previous bottle I have tasted from this excellent domaine. Happily, I note that the domaine still shows bottles sealed under natural cork on their website, so I hope this is just a “one-off” and the wine will be sealed under cork again in the future. 2013-2014. **86.**

2012 Quincy “Cuvée Très Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Mardon

The 2012 Quincy “Cuvée Très Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Mardon is an excellent wine that fully shows how well this eastern end of the Loire Valley has done in this vintage. The deep, complex and vibrant nose wafts from the glass in a mix of pink grapefruit, lime, fresh-cut grass, a touch of petrol, chalky minerality and a bit of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance, crisp acids and a very long, elegant and youthful finish. Quincy can sometimes be a bit rustic in style, but the old vines here have produced a wine with as much elegance as one could find in Sancerre or Pouilly-Fumé. A fine bottle that will drink even better next year than this! 2013-2018. **92.**



A scene all too familiar to vignerons lately- storm clouds threatening hail over vineyards in the Loire.

Pouilly-Fumé

2012 Pouilly-Fumé “Les Cris”- Domaine A. Cailbourdin

I have always liked this bottling, and the 2012 Pouilly-Fumé “Les Cris” from Monsieur Cailbourdin is an outstanding vintage of this wine. The bouquet is deep, bright and complex, jumping from the glass in a mix of green apple, lime, fresh-cut grass, a bit of gooseberry, lovely, flinty soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely focus and textural sophistication, crisp acids and excellent complexity and balance on the long and zesty finish. Fine juice. 2013-2016+. **92.**

2011 Pouilly-Fumé “Clos des Chadoux”- Domaine Serge Dagueneau et Filles

The Clos des Chadoux from Domaine Serge Dagueneau et Filles is a single vineyard bottling of Pouilly-Fumé that hails from a parcel of forty-eight year-old vines and which is aged on the lees for eighteen months in tank prior to bottling. The 2011 is really a very lovely wine, wafting from the glass in a deep and classic aromatic constellation of gooseberry, green apple, flinty soil tones, fresh-mown grass and a dollop of petrol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and drinking beautifully, with excellent mid-palate depth, ripe framing acids, superb complexity and fine length and grip on the focused and juicy finish. 2011 is a less structured year and this wine will not make old bones, but it has lovely brightness and bounce and will be a superb glass of Pouilly-Fumé for at least the next three to four years. Fine juice. 2013-2016. **92.**

Sancerre

2012 Sancerre- Franck et Jean-François Bailly (Chavignol)

The 2012 Sancerre from Franck et Jean-François Bailly is a very elegant and classy example of the vintage. The deep, complex and very polished nose wafts from the glass in a mix of lime, gooseberry, lovely Chavignol botanicals, chalky minerality, orange peel and a nice topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and zesty, with a fine core, superb soil inflection, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and classy finish. Just a lovely bottle of Chavignol Sancerre! 2013-2017. **92.**

2012 Sancerre “Manoline”- Nicolas Carlin (Crezancy)

This was my first experience with the wines from Nicolas Carlin and I was very impressed with the purity and focus of this lovely wine. The superb nose wafts from the glass in an archetypical aromatic constellation of gooseberry, lime, hard limestone, gentle grassiness, white flowers and citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely mid-palate concentration, bright, snappy acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long, pure and perfectly-balanced finish. High class Sancerre! 2013-2018. **91+.**

2012 Sancerre “La Garenne”- Domaine Fernand Girard et Fils

I have long enjoyed the Sancerre “La Garenne” bottling of Domaine Girard, which has consistently offered up classic character at a very fair price. No, it does not scale the heights of the very best producers in the region, but it sells for a significantly lower tariff and is always a very lovely example of stainless steel raised Sancerre. The 2012 is excellent, offering up lovely depth and vibrant complexity in its bouquet of gooseberry, sweet grapefruit, gentle notes of cut grass, chalky soil tones, a hint of white pepper and a nice dollop of lime peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and youthful, with a fine core, nice framing acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and pure finish. This is still a pretty young wine and will continue to gain in complexity with further bottle age. It shows clearly that the 2012 vintage has been quite successful in the Sancerre region, as this wine has a lot more

mid-palate stuffing in this vintage than in several of the recent past. A lovely wine and a real bargain in the firmament of Sancerre! 2013-2016. **89+**.

2012 Sancerre “les Boucaults” Vieilles Vignes- Paul et Jean-Marc Pastou

The 2012 Sancerre “les Boucaults” Vieilles Vignes from Paul et Jean-Marc Pastou has a bit of a heavy hand with SO₂ on the nose, but once the wine opens up, there is a lot here to enjoy. With air, the wine offers up a discreetly complex and classy nose of grapefruit, gooseberry, gentle grassiness, a lovely base of chalk, lime zest and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and focused, with a good core of fruit, sound framing acids and a long, gently soil-driven finish. This is a well-made bottle that will be best over the near-term, as the acids here are a bit on the soft side- though perfectly adequate for drinking over the next few years. 2013-2016. **89**.

2012 Sancerre- Domaine Pierre Martin (Chavignol)

This was my first experience with the wines from Pierre Martin and I was quite impressed. His “straight” Sancerre hails from twenty-five year-old vines planted on *les Caillottes* and is fermented and raised in stainless steel. The bouquet on the 2012 is lovely, offering up a superb signature of *terroir* in its bouquet of lime, green apple, chalky minerality, fresh-mown grass, a bit of orange peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and really pretty, with lovely complexity, crisp acids and very good length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. I would hypothesize that the difference between the very top estates in Chavignol (folks like François Cotat or Gerard Boulay) and Pierre Martin is a question of yields (at least for this bottling), as this truly lovely wine does not taste as if it was cropped at particularly low crop levels, and as we all know, the maximum yield allowance in Sancerre is rather ludicrously generous. But, this is quite tasty and shows off plenty of complexity on both the nose and palate. 2013-2018. **90**.

2012 Sancerre- Domaine Hippolyte Reverdy

I wish I had the opportunity to taste the wines from Domaine Hippolyte Reverdy with more frequency, as this is one of my favorite producers in the appellation. The 2012 Sancerre here is excellent, offering up a refined and classy nose of green apple, lime, fresh-cut grass, chalky soil tones and a nice, youthful touch of white pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and focused, with a good core, ripe acids and fine length and grip on they well-balanced and squeaky-clean finish. High class Sancerre. 2013-2018+. **92**.

2012 Sancerre “Les Monts Damnés”- Claude et Florence Thomas-Labaille (Chavignol)

The 2012 Les Monts Damnés from Claude et Florence Thomas-Labaille is a lovely and tightly-knit example of the vintage that shows off great structural integrity and sense of reserve for the vintage and is destined to be one of the long-distance runners of 2012. The superb nose wafts from the glass in a very minerally mélange of gooseberry, lime, a touch of petrol, complex minerality, cut grass and orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a brisk, but seamless girdle of acidity, excellent focus and cut and a very long, youthful finish. This is already an excellent glass of Sancerre, but the real fireworks here are still a year or two away! Great juice. 2014-2025. **93**.

2011 Sancerre “les Monts Damnés”- Domaine Pierre Martin (Chavignol)

The 2011 Monts Damnés bottling from Pierre Martin is a very pretty example of the vintage for near-term drinking, but it is not quite as bright and clean as the very finest 2011s that I have tasted from the village of Chavignol. The bouquet is a touch deep-pitched in its mélange of green apple, orange, damp grass, a bit of Chartreuse-like botanicals, citrus peel and petrol. On

the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pretty soft, with a good core and complexity, fine focus, low acids and a long, open and gentle finish. This will need drinking up over the next year, but there are some very interesting elements here on both the nose and palate and it will be a good drink over the near-term. I cannot wait to taste this cuvée in the 2012 vintage! 2013-2014.

87.

1996 Sancerre “Clos la Néore”- Domaine Edmond Vatan (Chavignol)

It had been six years since I last had the good fortune to cross paths with a bottle of the 1996 Vatan Sancerre, and the wine has continued to slowly blossom and at age seventeen is probably starting to close in on its apogee of peak drinkability- but, with decades of future evolution clearly still in front of it! I had reported that the 1996 Vatan was the one vintage that had not made its way to the shores of the US (as the importer’s allocation had gone down with a ship coming across the Atlantic), but as this particular bottle had the Weygandt Selections strip label on it, I guess that a small number of cases were found in the cellar to at least get a couple of boxes to the American market on a future shipment. This is a brilliant vintage for this iconic wine, soaring from the glass in a complex aromatic blend of lime peel, orange, petrol, Chartreuse-like botanicals, pulverized stone, fresh almond and just a whisper of grassiness. With extended air, the wine also develops lovely notes of beeswax and a dollop of licorice! On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with superb focus and balance, a rock solid core and outstanding length and grip on the laser-like and zesty finish. This wine is clearly going to last longer than I initially thought when I had the pleasure to taste it during a visit with Monsieur Vatan back in 2007, and I probably underestimated its aging ability by at least a couple of decades. Sancerre just does not get any better than this brilliant wine! 2013-2035. **96.**

1989 Sancerre “Clos la Néore”- Domaine Edmond Vatan (Chavignol)

I was first introduced to the magical wines of Edmond Vatan with the 1988 vintage, which was first shipped into the US in late 1989, so I found it fascinating to go back to one of those very earliest vintages with which I was familiar and see how the wine had evolved over a couple of decades. The wine is still bright and youthfully vibrant on the nose, with perhaps just a whisper of botrytis character found in its aromatic mélange of grapefruit, green apple, lime, kaleidoscopic, chalky minerality, fresh mint and other botanicals and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully focused, with a lovely core, still plenty of acidity and a very long, complex and mineral finish that shows just a touch of backend heat at this point in its evolution. This wine is at its apogee of maturity, but still has plenty of life ahead of it and shows no signs of getting long in the tooth any time soon. It might serve as a stylistic blueprint for how the ripe 2005 or 2009 versions may fare with extended bottle age. 2013-2025+. **92.**

Sancerre Rouge

2011 Sancerre Rouge- Domaine Bailly-Reverdy (Bué)

The 2011 Sancerre Rouge from Domaine Bailly-Reverdy is a fine, young example of its appellation. The nose is bright and youthfully expressive, offering up a fine blend of cherries, blood orange, vinesmoke, a touch of nutskin, incipient notes of the game to come with age, chalky soil tones and a nice topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is fullish, tightly-knit and rock solid at the core, with tangy acids, a bit of tannin, a stripe of herbaceousness running down the spine and excellent length and grip on the soil-driven finish. This is only moderately ripe in personality, but really has nice intensity of flavor and may blossom into something really

interesting with a few years of bottle age. I would be inclined to give it the benefit of the doubt and expect a lovely bottle if tucked away in the cellar for three or four years. 2015-2025+. **88+?**

2011 Sancerre Rouge- Domaine Pierre Martin (Chavignol)

Pierre Martin's 2011 Sancerre Rouge is one of the nicest balanced examples of this genre that I have tasted in some time, as the extraction here is fairly gentle and the wine shows a lot of pinot noir's inherent elegance. The fine bouquet is a mix of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of bonfire, espresso, fresh herbs, a touch of black olive and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and light on its feet, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, soil-driven and tangy finish. I really like this wine, which shows good, cool fruit tones and nicely ripe tannins. A fine example. 2013-2020+. **90.**

Côte Roannaise

The Côte Roannaise is actually closer to Beaujolais than it is to Tours, but it is on the extreme reaches of the Loire River (which at this point in its circuit actually travels north-south and is in parallel with the Rhône River). I am not sure if the Côte Roannaise is officially considered part of the Loire Valley region, but seeing as it sits on the river here, I have added notes on a couple of good wines I tasted from here for this report. The soils here are a combination of Beaujolais' granite and schist, which gives the gamay that is planted here a rounder style that is quite appealing in its own right.

2012 Côte Roannaise "les Originelles"- Domaine Robert Sérol

I reported on a couple of Robert Sérol's bottlings in Issue 45, and the 2012 les Originelles bottling is a lovely example of Gamay, wafting from the glass in a low octane blend of cherries, pomegranate, vinesmoke, herb tones, a complex base of soil tones and just a bit of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full and very intensely flavored, with a good core, a slightly weedy personality, modest tannins and a long, very tangy and soil-driven finish. This is cut very much in the style of the 2012 Beaujolais vintage, so the same caveats apply for folks who do not want any herb tones in their red wines. But, there is a lot of character and complexity on display here. 2013-2020. **87+.**

THE 1983 BORDEAUX VINTAGE
SUPERB QUALITY FOREVER IN THE LONG SHADOW OF 1982



The 1983 vintage in Bordeaux turned thirty this year, and it seemed to be a good time to check in on a number of wines from this harvest and see how they are faring as they get ready to embark on their fourth decade of life. This was a bit of a difficult year for the *Bordelais*, as there was fine flowering in June (which guaranteed another large crop- although slightly smaller than in the previous year of 1982), but both July and August were scorching in terms of temperatures, and the latter month was further plagued by a fair number of thunder storms and nearly constant humidity over the first three weeks of the month, which ensured ideal conditions for the spread of rot and mildew in the vineyards. Constant treatments were the rule of the day in the month of August of 1983, and even the most vigilant vineyard managers were not always successful in keeping these scourges entirely at bay. The end of August at least witnessed the cessation of rain and September was also bright and quite dry, which allowed the grapes to be brought in under ideal conditions and the struggles of mid-summer seemed to have been overcome as the crop was harvested. Out of the blocks, the wines were hailed as quite “classic” in style, with far less opulence and mid-palate stuffing in evidence than in the youthfully voluptuous 1982s (with the exception of the commune of Margaux, which experienced a great vintage in 1983), but by and large the wines seemed to have good balance and structure for positive evolution in the bottle.

This was the first claret vintage that I sold *en masse* in the wine trade, as I had been finishing up my university days when the 1982s were shipped here to the states in 1984, so I had quite a bit of experience with the '83s right out of the blocks. It was never a vintage that captured my imagination back in those early days, as my far less seasoned palate had a hard time garnering the same excitement for the 1983 vintage as for the fleshier and far more sexy 1982s. In fact, I was convinced that I had missed my opportunity to buy the 1982s when they were first offered on futures at such advantageous prices, and spent much of my early income from those days in the trade scrambling to latch onto '82s at what were considered very inflated prices at the time, and bought very little '83 claret for my cellar when the wines were plentiful and very cheap in the US market. I probably would have been very well-served to buy more 1983s early on, but I was not alone in paying less attention to the vintage than the quality of the wines probably deserved back then, and when the beautifully refined 1985s started to arrive, the '83 clarets were pretty much dead in the water here in the US market. Thirty years on, it is pretty clear that, while the vintage is far from a consistent success from commune to commune, there are an awful lot of truly exceptional wines from 1983 and these very top wines offered up some stellar buying opportunities back in their early days for those more savvy than I was at the time.

From the outset, it was clear that the outstanding reputation of the 1983 vintage in the commune of Margaux was certainly warranted, and there is no doubt that the very finest expressions of the vintage can be found here. Sadly, this report does not include a note on the '83 Château Margaux, as I had drunk up my bottles years ago and have not crossed paths with it in the recent past. The last time I saw a bottle it was drinking beautifully, with a more powerful personality than either the 1982 or 1985 vintages of this estate. However, I did taste a bottle of the estate's second wine, Pavillon Rouge de Margaux in preparation for this report, and this wine continues to drink very well and still offers up plenty of potential longevity. Château Palmer is brilliant in '83, and it would not surprise me that if this proves to be the longest-lived wine of the commune. Beyond the official confines of the Margaux appellation, one should also mention the stellar successes of two Haut Médoc estates who lie just to the south of the official end of the Margaux boundary- La Lagune and Cantemerle- both also shared the same phenomenal success as the estates in Margaux proper. Both wines are stellar and remain two of the finest values to be had on the auction markets today for mature claret. Outside of the commune of Margaux and its close neighbors, the vintage is not as consistent as other top vintages from the decade of the 1980s, and one really must pick and choose a bit to find the most successful wines. But, despite this inconsistency, one should not be misled into believing that this is a second rate vintage, as the very large number of truly exceptional wines produced in the 1983 vintage certainly outstrips the number of unequivocal successes in recent, highly-touted and (at least) equally inconsistent years such as 2003 and 2010.

In the Médoc, it is a bit of a mixed bag, with my favorite wines that I have tasted of late being the 1983 Château Pichon-Lalande (truly a great vintage for this estate), Château Ducru-Beaucaillou (another great wine and one of the most underrated vintages at this superb property in the last forty years!) and Château Leoville-Poyferré, which is a stellar follow-up to the great wine made here in 1982 and another absolute sleeper. I did not cross paths with recent bottles of the First Growths in Pauillac in preparation for this article, but recall the Mouton-Rothschild as a very pleasant and fleshy wine best-suited for more near-term consumption, the Latour rather

buttoned up and a bit sinewy in style, and the '83 Lafite-Rothschild a very good, but not a great vintage for this property. But, it has been at least seven or eight years since I last tasted any of these wines to see how they were evolving. I have had some lovely examples from the Graves in this vintage in recent years, and it seems pretty clear that after the commune of Margaux, the best wines are found in the Graves in 1983. This is also a very strong year for the white wines from this commune, though I have only had the sublime Domaine de Chevalier Blanc and Haut-Brion Blanc of late from the '83 vintage.

On the Right Bank, 1983 is not a top vintage, but as is often the case here, there are some stellar successes that absolutely transcend the general quality of the year and are outstanding wines. Amongst these I would rank Ausone (perhaps the wine of the vintage!), Cheval Blanc, Canon and Trotanoy as my absolute favorites that I have tasted in recent times, though I should mention that I have not seen in many years the 1983s from a few of my consistently most beloved estates such as Vieux Château Certan, Figeac and La Conseillante. One of the real eye-openers of my series of tastings for this report was the quality of the 1983 Château Certan-Giraud (the estate no longer exists, as the lion's share of its former vineyards now comprise Château Hosanna) which was absolutely exquisite and more than held its own in flights where it was flanked by far bigger named châteaux such as Latour à Pomerol, l'Evangile and Lafleur. It is one of the great sleepers out there from the 1983 vintage and is well worth a search of the auction markets to locate! Looking back on my notes, I have had very good examples of Certan-Giraud in both 1982 and 1989 as well, so I do not know why the exemplary quality of the 1983 came as such a surprise!

One of the things that I found very surprising in reviewing observations on the 1983 claret vintage from other commentators was the constant refrain that began more than a decade ago that the vintage was then fully mature and in need of drinking up in the very near future. As so many of these comments were made around the turn of the century or earlier, they are obviously not correct, as for the most part, the 1983 vintage of Bordeaux is just starting to drink well at age thirty and is just beginning to approach its apogee right now. There are a few lesser wines that are now getting towards the far sides of their plateaus of maturity, but the vast, vast majority of the wines that I tasted over the last several months from the '83 vintage are in their primes and have decades of life still ahead of them. How folks (who should have known better, given how much claret they have drunk over the years) could come to the conclusion that the '83s were ready (or already starting to fade) and in need of drinking up ten to fifteen years ago is a bit of a mystery to me, but be that as it may, there is no doubt that this is a vintage that is really starting to realize its potential right now and deliver outstanding, mature claret in the glass today. There are a great many of the most structured examples of the vintage- such as La Mission Haut-Brion, l'Evangile, Ducru-Beaucaillou, Leoville Las Cases and others- that still definitely require a handful of years in the cellar before they will fully shed their remaining tannins and reach the same superb plateau of maturity as other top wines from the vintage, but for the most part, now is a wonderful time to start drinking this vintage.

Where does the vintage rank in the hierarchy of the glorious decade of the 1980s in Bordeaux? I would certainly rank 1985, 1982 and 1989 ahead of the '83s, but I am not so sure that it will not eventually prove to have been superior to both 1986 and 1988. To be fair, the 1986s remain young, tough and tannic wines that may eventually really blossom and fulfill their

considerable early potential, and if they do end up doing this in the fullness of time, then they should outpace the 1983s- but, in 2013, this is not a foregone conclusion and to my mind there remains serious question marks about how the still quite stern 1986s will ultimately turn out. Certainly it is way too early to be writing off the 1986s- particularly from the Left Bank- but, I would certainly be reaching for a 1983 out of my cellar for drinking today over its comparable 1986. While all of the discussion of the article thus far has dealt with the red wines of the vintage, I should note that 1983 was a really fine year for the white wines of the Graves region, and though I only have a couple of recent notes on 1983 white wines, it is a vintage that I constantly keep an eye out for at auction, as the wines (if well-stored) are drinking very well right now and still have plenty of life ahead of them. The only disappointing '83 white Graves that I have had of late was a strangely tropical bottle of Haut-Brion Blanc, but as other bottles of this wine were classic, I have put this down to an "off" bottle. 1983 is also an absolutely outstanding Sauternes vintage, and though I have not covered those wines in this report, I have had superb bottles of Climens and Lafaurie-Peyraguey in the last couple of months and I strongly recommend the 1983 Sauternes to folks who cross paths with those lovely wines.

The following wines have been tasted over the course of this past year, in anticipation of revisiting the vintage on the occasion of its thirtieth birthday. This is not a comprehensive lineup of tasting notes with all of the top 1983s represented, as my efforts to taste a few more '83s beyond what is in my own cellar (and my friends here in New York) during my last trip to Bordeaux in April were not particularly successful (with the exception of the lovely 1983 Château Canon, which the team there had no difficulties in locating during the circus week of En Primeur), as many proprietors observed that it was not a vintage that they had retained very many bottles of in the cellar. Nevertheless, I think the breadth of tasting notes below is sufficient to give a good read on where this very good vintage is today in its arc of evolution, and how much longer it can be expected to offer up very good to outstanding drinking. At least it will become readily apparent that the myriad of erroneous reports of this vintage's early demise are grossly inaccurate and a couple of decades too early.

Ste. Estèphe

1983 Château Meyney

The red wines of the Cordier empire of the 1980s- Meyney, Talbot and Gruaud-Larose- tended to often have a fair level of brettanomyces in their wines during this decade, and this was certainly in evidence to varying degrees in both the '83 Meyney and the '83 Gruaud that we tasted here in New York in October. The Meyney eventually cleans up pretty well aromatically with some extended air, as the barnyardy tone of brett recedes and other elements climb to the fore to offer up scents of cassis, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones, leather, some meatiness and a fairly discreet base of barnyard. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely structured, with a good core, still a fair bit of tannin and a long, focused and complex finish that closes with plenty of grip. If one is pretty tolerant of brett, then this is quite an enjoyable bottle with plenty of life still ahead of it. The price tag was still on the bottle from its original purchase, and at \$9 a bottle, this has stood the test of time pretty well at age thirty! 2013-2035+. **88.**



Pauillac

1983 Château Pichon-Lalande

The 1983 Pichon-Lalande is a beautiful wine that is fully mature and drinking beautifully. The deep, pure and complex nose wafts from the glass in a very stylish blend of cassis, fresh herb tones, mocha, cigar ash, gravelly soil nuances and a lovely base of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and classically plush on the attack, with a fine core, lovely breed and complexity, tangy acids and just a bit of remaining tannin perking up the long and classy finish. This has always been one of my favorite vintages from this era at Pichon-Lalande and the wine is drinking at its apogee at age thirty, but still has decades and decades of life ahead of it. Fine juice from a great stretch at this superb Second Growth. 2013-2040. **93.**

St. Julien

1983 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

After a chewy and youthful bottle of the '83 Ducru that I reported on in the feature on this great estate last year, I was very happy to cross paths with a much more accessible bottle in preparation for this vintage report. I clearly underrated the wine last year, as this bottle emphatically demonstrates, as it soars from the glass is a deep, pure and nascently complex nose of cassis, dark berries, woodsmoke, a touch of Ducru nuttiness, beautifully complex, gravelly soil tones, a touch of juniper berry, Cuban tobacco and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly refined, with a rock solid core of fruit, refined tannins, excellent

focus and balance and outstanding length and grip on the elegant and utterly classic finish. A great vintage of Ducru in the making, the 1983 should still be cellared for several more years to allow it to fully blossom. 2020-2075. **94.**

1983 Château Gruaud-Larose

The 1983 vintage of Gruaud-Larose is a bit marked by brett, but there is a lot to like here alongside the touch of “horsiness”. The deep, black fruity and quite powerful nose offers up a blend of cassis, grilled meats, cigar ash, charred wood, dark soil tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open, with fine mid-palate concentration, still a bit of well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and nicely tangy finish. This is a lovely wine that is just now reaching its apogee of maturity and will have many decades more life ahead of it. For those with low brett tolerance, this is probably not an ideal wine, but if one can put up with a bit, the depth and complexity here are quite enjoyable. For my own palate, this is on the threshold of a touch too bretty, and I will opt to serve it alongside beef or lamb on the grill, where the charred aspect of the meat will work very well with the profile of the wine. 2013-2050. **88-92** (depending on one’s tolerance).

1983 Château Leoville Las Cases

The 1983 Las Cases is still a very young and primary example of the vintage, and at age thirty, I am not sure if the wine is still in an extended “dumb” phase, or if this vintage is always going to be a bit dense in style. The bouquet is a youthful blend of cassis, black cherries, Cuban cigars, gravelly soil tones and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite compact, with a sound core, rather moderate tannins (particularly for such an unevolved wine!) and good, but not great length and grip on the hunkered down finish. Perhaps this wine will blossom with more bottle age, but it is also very possible that the use of concentrators or what have you has left this wine eternally bound up in its cellar techniques and will never really develop the purity and charm that characterize so many of the great wines in this vintage. It is still not a bad wine in its forceful manner, but one expects more from Las Cases in a top vintage. 2018-2050+? **90+?**

1983 Château Leoville-Poyferré

Château Leoville-Poyferré used to be one of my absolute favorite estates on the Left Bank, as its low fat, soil-driven style was so compelling, but the estate has been making pumped up, modern wines for quite a while now and the modern and simplistic wines turned out here today bear little resemblance to the understated and classic beauty of this wine in its heyday. However, back in 1983, the estate was at the top of its game (though few commentators recognized it at the time!) and at age thirty, the ’83 Leoville-Poyferré is really lovely, wafting from the glass in a deep and utterly suave nose of black cherries, sweet cranberries, Cuban cigars, a beautifully complex base of dark soil tones, a touch of dried eucalyptus, woodsmoke and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and transparent, with an excellent core, moderate tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. An excellent and very elegant example of the vintage, the ’83 Leoville-Poyferré has now reached its peak of maturity, but will continue to drink beautifully for many, many decades to come. 2013-2050. **93.**

Margaux

1983 Château Giscours

The 1983 Château Giscours has never had a strong reputation, as this was at the start of a slump period at the property that commenced with the 1982 and lasted for much of the next two

decades. Given how superb the wines were at this estate in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, when Giscours could be counted on to be one of the finest wines produced each year in the commune of Margaux, the '83 is a bit of a letdown. But that said, the wine is really not nearly as bad as its reputation and is really a rather interesting drink in its slightly rustic style, as it offers up a complex mélange of cassis, meaty tones, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, gravel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch angular, with melting tannins, good balance and perfectly acceptable length and grip on the focused finish. This is not the most elegant or deep example of Giscours, but it is a perfectly serviceable drink that still shows a bit of the complexity that defined this wine for the twenty-plus years prior to this vintage. A modestly pleasant surprise, given the wine's rather abysmal reputation. 2013-2030. **88.**

1983 Château d'Issan

Château d'Issan was not making wines at the superb level it does today back in the '83 vintage, as Emmanuel Cruse did not arrive here until the 1995 vintage and his dramatic impact on the quality of the wines from this superb estate was still far in the future when the grapes were harvested here in 1983. I remember selling this wine in the early days and it was not a bad bottle for earlier drinking, but it has not aged with the same grace as so many other wines from this commune and is now fully mature and quite tertiary in style. The bouquet offers up a high-toned and slightly rustic blend of cherries, dried berries, saddle leather, some medicinal tones, cigar ash and cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and quite long on the backend, with a pretty modest core of fruit, melted tannins and good intensity of flavor and complexity on the fully mature finish. This is not a bad wine for drinking over the next twelve to fifteen years, but it is a far cry from the quality level that is routinely found at d'Issan today. Those were different days. 2012-2030+. **88.**

1983 Pavillon Rouge de Margaux

The 1983 Pavillon Rouge is a very pretty second wine that is now fully mature and drinking at its apogee. The lovely nose offers up scents of red and black cherries, cigar ash, a fine base of soil tones, tobacco smoke and a bit of fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite suave on the attack, with a solid core, lovely focus and balance, fairly modest complexity, but a long, velvety finish that closes with very good grip and poise. This has some of the textural elements that make the *grand vin* of Châteaux Margaux so prized, and while it is not the most complex example of the vintage out there, it does deliver a lot of drinking pleasure at the present time and shows no sign of slowing down any time soon. A fine second wine. 2013-2035. **89.**

1983 Château Palmer

The 1983 Palmer has long been recognized as one of the best wines of the vintage and this most recent bottle was absolutely lovely. The beautiful and very suave nose wafts from the glass in a superb blend of black cherries, mulberries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of coffee, fresh herb tones and a lovely framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and quite velvety on the attack, with a plush core of fruit, outstanding complexity and focus, moderate tannins and a very long, poised and supremely elegant finish. This is a lovely wine that has been drinking brilliantly for many years, but I wonder if it is going to go through a period where it closes down just a touch, before reemerging in all its glory? Certainly this very lovely bottle seems a tad less wide open than the last few I have tasted. 2013-2045. **94.**

1983 Château Rausan-Ségla

The bottle of Rausan-Ségla we had at our tasting in February of 2013 was not on form, but fortunately, I had crossed paths with a bottle a year earlier that was in good shape and showing very well indeed. The pristine bottle offers up a lovely nose of cassis, black raspberries, tobacco ash, fresh herb tones, dark soil, a touch of charred wood and gentle tariness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite black fruity in personality, with a good core, sound balance, modest tannins and very good length and grip on the finish. This particular bottle of the '83 Rausan-Ségla was served alongside the 1986, and though it could not match the younger wine for precision, mid-palate depth and elegance, it remains a very good glass of mature claret and it is quite clear that the renaissance at this estate began with this lovely 1983. 2011-2025+. **90.**

1983 Château du Tertre

The 1983 Château du Tertre is not a wine of great reputation, but it was quite tasty and structurally sound at our vintage tasting in October. The bouquet is quite elegantly evolved, offering up scents of black cherries, a touch of cocoa, violets, cigar smoke and a gentle base of forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite velvety on the attack, with a good core of fruit, gentle acids, melting tannins and lovely length and grip on the surprisingly complex and perfectly mature finish. This will not make old bones, but for drinking over the next dozen years or so, there is a lot of pleasure to be had here. A sleeper of the vintage. 2013-2025+? **88.**

Médoc

1983 Château Cantemerle

I have always thought of Château Cantemerle (and its near neighbor, Château La Lagune) as really wines of the Margaux appellation, as they are not far to the south of the limit of that appellation and spiritually, quite akin to top examples from this commune. The 1983 Cantemerle is an absolutely superb wine that shares the Margaux appellation's stellar success in this vintage, as the wine offers up a deep and classy nose of cassis, dark berries, a bit of roasted game, cigar ash, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a gentle framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, plush on the attack and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, melting tannins, outstanding complexity and breed, and superb length and grip on the focused and sophisticated finish. This is a beautiful vintage of Cantemerle at its apogee, but with decades of life still ahead of it. 2013-2035+. **93.**

1983 Château La Lagune

Prior to our tasting in October, I had not crossed paths with a bottle of the '83 La Lagune since the early years of the 1990s, and the wine has aged beautifully and is far more complete than I would have imagined- based on those early showings. The wine is now into its apogee of peak drinkability and delivers a superb, complex bouquet of black cherries, cassis, hints of black truffles, sweet cigar tones and a lovely base of dark soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with lovely mid-palate depth, melted tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and *à point* finish. This is a really fine example of the 1983 vintage for current drinking. 2013-2035. **91+.**



The beautiful Château Cantemerle tucked in amongst the trees on the stunning grounds.

Graves Blanc

1983 Domaine de Chevalier Blanc

The 1983 DDC Blanc has been a legendary example of this great wine for as long as I can remember, but it has always been a classic and deeply structured wine that has taken its own sweet time to wind around towards maturity. At age thirty, the wine is really starting to drink very well for the first time in its long existence, offering up a superb nose of fresh figs, green apple, gentle grassiness, a bit of petrol, beeswax, complex, chalky soil tones and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with bottomless depth, great purity and focus, a rock solid spine of acidity and outstanding balance and grip on the poised and racy finish. This is a great vintage for Domaine de Chevalier Blanc, and the wine still has decades of life ahead of it. 2013-2035+. **95.**

1983 Château Haut-Brion Blanc

The most recent bottle of '83 Haut-Brion Blanc that I crossed paths with was oddly forward and tropical in profile, but I am sure that this was an off bottle, as every previous example has been absolutely stellar and classic in style. Rather than print a note on a bottle that was so atypical, I have reached back a couple of years for the last pristine bottle of '83 HBB that I tasted. With this previous bottle, the wine was absolutely singing, offering up a deep, pure and *à point* nose of fig, apple, fresh-culled herbs, petrol, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and seamless, with a lovely core, impeccable focus

and balance and outstanding length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. I note that the '83 Haut-Brion Blanc tips the scales at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol, which is a far cry from the mid-fourteens this wine has been sporting in the last several, less than stellar vintages. This is a classic vintage of this magical wine. 2010-2030+. **94.**

Graves Rouge

1983 Domaine de Chevalier Rouge

The 1983 Domaine de Chevalier is a brilliant wine and one of my favorite vintages from this estate in the decade of the 1980s- which was a very, very strong period for this estate. The wine offers up a beautiful and utterly classic nose of roasted cassis, pure black cherries, singed tobacco, chocolate, a beautifully refined base of soil tones, a deft touch of vanillin oak, classic DDC smokiness and incipient notes of the black truffles that will come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, suave and intensely flavored, with a fine core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance, still a touch of tannin and lovely grip on the complex and utterly suave and elegant, long finish. Just a superb vintage of DDC. 2013-2040. **93.**

1983 Château Haut Bailly (served from magnum)

The 1983 Haut Bailly in magnum is an absolutely beautiful wine and is drinking brilliantly at age twenty-eight. The utterly classic nose jumps from the glass in a complex and refined mélange of plums, a touch of dark berry, cocoa powder, summer truffles, tobacco leaf, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote of Cuban cigars. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very refined, with excellent complexity, lovely mid-palate depth, just a whisper of remaining tannin and excellent focus and grip on the tangy and very long finish. This is a classic vintage for Haut Bailly, and I can think of nothing better to have done with the last magnum in my cellar than to have served it to Marie-Andrée Mugneret and her family when they were visiting New York, as both Mugneret sisters have inherited a great taste for classic Bordeaux from their father, who was a serious claret collector- in addition to being one of the Côte d'Or's greatest winemakers of his generation. 2010-2030+. **92.**

1983 Château La Mission Haut Brion

The 1983 vintage of La Mission Haut Brion is a very lovely wine that was quite structured in its youth, but as it reaches thirty years of age, it has blossomed into a superb and utterly classic example of this fine year. The superb bouquet offers up a very complex blend of cassis, black cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, new leather, a nice touch of meatiness, a bit of medicinal La Mission overtones, incipient notes of black truffles, cigar smoke and chipotle pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and beautifully balanced, with its full-bodied format showing off a beautiful core of fruit, a superb signature of soil, still a fair bit of moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the very long and well-balanced finish. A fine, fine vintage for La Mission that still could do with a few more years in the cellar to really reach its apogee. 2020-2060+. **94.**



Pomerol

1983 Château Certan-Giraud

I had never had the pleasure to sample the 1983 Château Certan-Giraud prior to our October tasting, but I felt very vindicated for buying a lone bottle of this at auction a few years ago to try when it was time to write up the vintage. This is estate used to be owned by the Cruse family, but when certain branches of the family wanted to cash out of the wine business in 1999, this property was sold off in two pieces, with a four hectare parcel going to Michel Delon (who incorporated this into Château Nenin) and the remainder which was sold to Ets. J. P. Moueix who crafted Château Hosanna out of the finest section of the vineyards and bottle the remainder of the estate under the Château Certan-Marzelle name (that the property was known as prior to being purchased by the Giraud family in 1956). The former Certan-Giraud is a brilliantly situated *terroir*, tucked in between Vieux Château Certan, Château Lafleur and Château Pétrus at the eastern end of the Pomerol plateau. The 1983 showed superbly at our tasting, outdistancing Pomerols of greater distinction such as l'Evangile and Lafleur on this occasion. The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, offering up a lovely blend of plums, black cherries, chocolate, a touch of game, nutskins, a lovely base of gravelly soil tones and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a rock solid core of fruit, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and perfectly balanced finish. This was quite a revelation! 2013-2035+. **92.**

1983 Château l'Evangile

The 1983 Château l'Evangile is the last major vintage here before the property was bought by the Rothschilds of Lafite fame. The wine is still on the young side, but offers up very good complexity on both the nose and palate, and if it can eventually blossom more fully from behind its (still rather sturdy) structural elements, it will be a lovely vintage at this property. The bouquet is a complex blend of black cherries, plums, a bit of game, herb tones, coffee, tobacco leaf, a fine base of soil and a distinct topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite vigorous structurally, with a fine core, a fair bit of tannin to resolve and a very long, nascently complex and soil-driven finish. Today, this is not the most elegant vintage of l'Evangile, but there is a lot of promise here and if the wine can develop a more suave palate profile with further bottle age, then my score may seem a bit conservative. 2016-2040+. **91+?**

1983 Château Lafleur

I used to adore the 1983 Château Lafleur, which is a wine that I owned quite a bit of at one time, but I drank my cache of the wine up in earlier days and I had not crossed paths with a bottle of this wine in more than a decade. Much like the 1982, the 1983 has gotten quite a bit more marked by notes of *sur maturité* on both the nose and palate as time has gone by, with the bouquet now defined by notes of prunes, fruitcake, chocolate, dried eucalyptus, cigarette ash and soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, powerful and very soil-driven in personality, with a firm core, still plenty of tannin and now a bit of uncovered alcohol starting to poke out on the long and chewy finish. This is not a great time to be drinking the 1983 Lafleur, which seems to have gone into a bit of a closed period, but the combination of overripe aromatics and flavors, as well as some backend heat, makes one seriously wonder about its long-term prospects. This wine has to be well over fourteen percent alcohol, and it has not aged with anywhere near the grace I would have imagined, given how superb it was in its relative youth. I have never seen wines in this style come back from the brink, but perhaps the '83 Lafleur can prove the exception. 2017-2040+? **86-91+?**

1983 Château La Fleur de Gay

The 1983 vintage was only the second for the bottling of Château La Fleur de Gay, which is crafted from a parcel of old vines at Château La Croix de Gay that are turned over to Michel Rolland to tattoo with his predictably powerful and oaky style signature. As this was only the second vintage, I had hopes that the wine might have been made in a more restrained style back then (certainly the 1985 La Fleur de Gay showed some relative elegance early on), but that was not the case and the wine has now begun to lose whatever complexity it might previously have had and is on its way to decline. The simple and ham-fisted nose offers up scents of plums, chocolate, tar, bug spray and plenty of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly devoid of complexity, with a tarry and four-square personality, still a solid core and modest tannins on the simple and short finish. This will remain passably drinkable for another ten years or so, but its salad days (such as they were) are already in the rearview mirror and this wine will merely hang on from here on out, rather than offer much pleasure or excitement. I do not recall ever tasting this wine back in the decade of the 1980s, so I do not know how the wine has evolved over the years, but today, it is a chunky, simple and tarry wine of modest quality. To be fair, 1983 was not a great vintage in Pomerol, but this wine's inherent weaknesses today seem to have been crafted in the cellar, rather than acquired in the vineyard. 2013-2025+? **84.**

1983 Château Latour à Pomerol

I had never previously tasted the 1983 Château Latour à Pomerol, but its description in another claret commentator's book as "among the richest, most powerfully constructed, broodingly opaque, and enormous Pomerols of the 1983 vintage" certainly did not augur well for the wine's breed or elegance. In fact, this is one of the most over-extracted and least interesting vintages of Latour à Pomerol that I have tasted. The rather ham-fisted nose offers up scents of plums, black cherries, leather, singed tobacco and mocha. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, chunky and four-square, with chewy tannins and good length and grip on the still quite monolithic finish. I suppose the possibility still exists that this wine will blossom into something more interesting with further bottle age, but at this point in its evolution, it is much easier to imagine that it will simply stay the course and remain a rather forced example of Latour à Pomerol where the technical team here did not embrace the style of the vintage, but tried to overwrite it with excessive cellar technique. It is still a perfectly solid wine, but Latour à Pomerol can be so much better than this 1983! 2013-2035. **87+**.

1983 Château Trotanoy

The 1983 Trotanoy is a beautiful example of the vintage and one of the great unsung years for this estate in the superb decade of the 1980s. The excellent bouquet offers up a very complex and classic mélange of dark berries, roasted plums, cigar smoke, a touch of new leather, tobacco leaf, incipient nuttiness, coffee, a beautiful base of gravelly soil, fresh herbs, incipient notes of black truffles and a smoke topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with a fine core of fruit, superb elegance and focus, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the perfectly balanced, creamy and light on its feet finish. A beautiful bottle of Trotanoy, the 1983 is now just arriving its apogee of peak drinkability and should cruise along at this fine level for another two or three decades- and may be even more enjoyable with another five or six years of the tannins melting further into the background. 2013-2035+. **92+**.

St. Émilion

1983 Château Ausone

The 1983 Ausone is one of the greatest wines of the vintage and a stunning example of the flamboyant personality of Ausone in its classical era. I have been fortunate to taste this wine four or five times in the past year, and it has never been short of dazzling! The bouquet today is far more open than was the case a couple of years ago and is really now beginning to show all of its magical complexity, as it soars from the glass in a marvelously complex and exotic mélange of cherries, red plums, blood orange, mocha, nutskins, very intense and exotic soil tones, a touch of menthol, Cuban cigars, fresh herbs, woodsmoke and a hint of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and seamless, with a flamboyant, sappy core of fruit, brilliant soil signature, tangy acids, ripe, modest tannins and an utterly profound, complex and perfectly poised finish. A great, great vintage of old school Ausone, which to my palate, simply towers over everything made here under the new style. 2013-2060. **96+**.



Entrance to the chais at Château Ausone, cut right into the fault-line, with the vines located above.

1983 Château Bélair

It seemed that it was very hard to cross paths with a good example of the 1983 Château Bélair in preparation for this report, as I had to open all four bottles from a small auction lot that I purchased last year to find a sound bottle of this wine. Out of the four, two of the bottles were corked and one was oxidized, but the fourth was a very nice wine that showed off all of the rather idiosyncratic style of Bélair in this era, but eventually offered up a complex and quite sophisticated glass of claret. The bouquet (after some rather extended aeration) offers up a lovely blend of red and black cherries, nutskins, complex, autumnal soil tones, coffee, menthol, candle wax and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and very soil-driven, with a lovely core of fruit, modest tannins, bright acids and very fine length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. Like its next door neighbor, Château Ausone, the Bélair wines from this era are very tightly-knit out of the blocks and take an extended period to really blossom when opened. The very unique (and rather funky) blend of candle wax, dusty soil tones and overt nuttiness that defines Bélair in this era is easily mistaken for corkiness (as was the case with the one good bottle of this wine that we had at our tasting- served hard on the heels of a bottle that was clearly TCA-tainted, it is not too surprising that many folks thought this bottle was also corked!) if one does not have the patience to let the wine open up with air. I can understand why this style of Bélair had a hard time finding a wider audience, but this is really a lovely vintage for the estate- if one can get luckier than I with provenance! 2018-2050+. **90.**

1983 Château Canon

I did not have an opportunity to taste the 1983 Canon when I was preparing my historical feature on this fine estate a couple of years ago, but was delighted to drink a bottle during my most recent visit to the region to taste the 2012 vintage. I had mentioned to the team at Canon when I made my appointment to taste during *En Primeur* that I wanted to write this article and asked if it would be possible to taste a bottle of their '83 after tasting the new vintage, and they most graciously provided a bottle to be shared at dinner later in the week. This type of generosity is a bit out of the ordinary in my experience in the region. In any event, this is a brilliant vintage of Canon, offering up a deep and beautifully complex nose of red and black cherries, menthol, nutskins, a touch of lavender, black truffles, a superb signature of soil, gentle notes of cigar smoke and a discreet base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, melting tannins and great backend energy on the focused, classy and very long finish. This is a glorious example of Canon and one of my favorite Right Bank wines in the 1983 vintage. Great juice. 2013-2035+. **93+**.

1983 Château Cheval Blanc

Along with Ausone, the '83 Cheval Blanc has long been one of the greatest wines of this vintage and it is showing no signs of slowing down any time soon. The wine has gone through periods of glorious drinking, followed by much more closed cycles over the years, but it seems now at age thirty to have finally reached the start of its plateau of maturity and I would be very surprised to see it shut down ever again in its lifetime. Today, the deep, pure and vibrant nose wafts from the glass in a youthfully complex blend of mulberries, menthol, black cherries, a touch of chocolate, tobacco leaf, lovely soil tones and a nice touch of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, great focus and complexity, and a very long, balanced and modestly tannic finish. The tannins today have fallen away to the point where this wine is very enjoyable to drink, and yet I still have the sense that the wine is relatively adolescent in its stage of development and more fireworks will still be unveiled if one can exercise a bit more patience. This is a great vintage of Cheval Blanc! 2013-2050. **95**.



As is often the case with my large feature on Champagne and sparkling wines at the end of the summer, several new bottlings tend to arrive here in New York right around the time I am completing the article and a second piece is called for in a follow-up issue. This was again the case this year, as a great many of my favorite producers had just sent new releases to the US as I was going to press with the last big feature on bubbly, so an addendum was called for to cover these fine new bottlings. Happily, this year also saw a terrific tasting of Blanc de Blancs bottlings from the 2002 vintage organized by one of New York's most astute collectors, Chet Kern, to check in on the vintage and see how the wines were evolving at age eleven. As many readers may already know, Chet has long been one of the most passionate Burgundy collectors here in New York, and his invitation to the 2002 Champagne tasting observed that "in an age of premoxy, Champagne is the new white Burgundy" and we should all be salting away bubbly in our cellars to help ease the pain of premature oxidation. The stunning lineup of 2002s at his tasting here in late October was a pretty good argument for cellaring Champagne these days, as other than a couple of corked bottles, the wines uniformly showed well and are evolving at a classic and relaxed pace. The vintage is generally starting to offer up simply stunning drinkability today, but clearly still with decades of positive evolution still in front of them. While the tasting was primarily for Blanc de Blancs bottlings from the fine 2002 vintage, there were a few wines that

were not one hundred percent chardonnay added to the lineup to keep us honest over the course of the long and very, very satisfying evening. By the way, I should mention the restaurant venue for the tasting here in New York, as it was one of the finest seafood menus I have ever had the pleasure to taste here in the United States (and there are some fancy, Michelin-starred seafood venues here in New York that consistently fall far short of the dazzling cuisine we enjoyed on this evening). The restaurant is called “Ed’s Chowder House” and is located near Lincoln Center, and despite its less than grandiose name, the meal that Executive Chef Ed Brown prepared for us on this evening was beautifully crafted and worked seamlessly with a wide variety of bubbles over the course of the evening. I have yet to dine directly off of the menu at the restaurant, but if the special tasting menu we enjoyed on this evening is indicative of the overall caliber of the cuisine here, this is one of the best-kept secrets in New York!

As readers may recall, the 2002 vintage in Champagne was an outstanding success, with a fine crop of ripe fruit brought in under nearly ideal conditions in the early autumn. The grapes were quite high in sugar in this vintage, as some *passerillage* (dehydration of the berries on the vine, usually through the north wind) tended to concentrate sugars, extract and acids in vineyards affected by this phenomenon. The concentrating effects of *passerillage* were particularly useful for the acidities of the wines, as this would have been a very low acid vintage without this boost, and even with this assistance from Mother Nature, the 2002 vintage is nowhere near as high acid as vintage such as 2004. However, September was also marked in 2002 by cool, crisp nights to go along with warm and sunny days, so that the wines have retained lovely freshness from the lower evening temperatures. The harvest was drawn out nicely, as ideal conditions allowed *vignerons* to pick when the grapes were optimal, with picking starting with chardonnay in the Côte des Blancs on September 12th and finishing up with pinots at the end of the month. While the reputation for the 2002s suggests that these wines will not make old bones, the results of our pretty good-sized tasting revealed far more wines that were still too young for primetime drinking than those that were now fully mature and ready to drink. At age eleven, it is still pretty early days for a top vintage in Champagne, but the overall quality of the wines we tasted here in New York was exemplary and there is no reason to lose even a small bit of enthusiasm for this vintage in general, as the wines are aging very gracefully indeed and offer up truly lovely aromatic and flavor complexity. Tom Stevenson, whose great experience with the region I very much admire (even if our palates do not always gravitate to the same wines) cites pinot noir as the most successful grape to be found in 2002, but our tasting here focused primarily on Blanc de Blancs bottlings and really found nothing wanting with the chardonnay from this vintage. Another decade will see whether or not the 2002 vintage in Champagne does indeed turn out to be rather precocious in style, or if the wines’ inherently beautiful balances will allow them to age longer than initially predicted. But, at this point in time, there is no reason to lose any enthusiasm for 2002, and we are now starting to get closer to the eventual releases of the vintage-dated bottlings of 2002 from the house of Krug, which will be very exciting wines to taste in the coming years. It has always been my view that one cannot really come to final conclusions on the quality of a vintage in Champagne until one has had the Krug bottlings from that year!

Sparkling Wines

2010 Ridgeview “Bloomsbury” Vintage Brut (England)

Many thanks to Jancis Robinson and Hugh Johnson for selecting to pour this superb English sparkler at the launch party for their new edition of the World Atlas of Wine, as I was

completely unfamiliar with this producer and really enjoyed the wine. The *cépages* here is sixty-one percent chardonnay, twenty-seven percent pinot noir and twelve percent pinot meunier. The wine offers up a very fine bouquet of apple, quince, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely focus, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the refined finish. This is lovely juice. 2013-2020+. **90.**

Brut Nature and Brut Zero

Bérèche Père et Fils Extra Brut NV (Ludes) Disgorged November 2012

I actually ran across both a bottle and a magnum of the non-vintage Bérèche Père et Fils Extra Brut in a span of four days this fall, but both bottlings were disgorged at the same time and clearly the same wine. The wine is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, a complex base of soil tones, brioche, a touch of lime blossom and a nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely focus, refined *mousse* and perfect balance on the very long and elegant finish. This is a superb bottle of Extra Brut. 2013-2025+. **92.**

Champagne Corbon “Absolument Brut” Brut Nature (Avize)

The Champagne Corbon “Absolument Brut” is a really lovely bottle of bone dry Champagne that I would find more interesting with a bit of *dosage* to buffer the steely structure and fine minerality. The complex bouquet is a youthful blend of delicious apple, a touch of pear, stony limestone, bread dough and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tight and soil-driven, with brisk acids, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a very long, very dry and minerally finish. There is an awful lot to like here, but this really strikes me as very much a “purists’ wine” and I wonder if the house is not limiting their audience a bit by making such a dry bottling. 2013-2025. **90.**

Georges Laval Premier Cru Brut Nature NV (Cumières) Disgorged April 2013

I only tasted one of the cuvées from Cumières maven, Georges Laval this year, but what a lovely bottle! I am generally not that big of a fan of Champagne that shows some overt oakiness, but Monsieur Laval’s wines are an exception for me, as the purity of mineral expression and the precision of the fruit here more than makes up for a bit of elbowing in by the wood. The youthful nose offers up a deep and complex mélange of white peach, apple, brioche, a lovely, complex base of minerality, a bit of citrus peel and a nice framing of gently buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with elegant *mousse*, brisk acids, great backend mineral drive and outstanding length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This is still early days for this wine, which will be even better with another couple of years in the cellar, as the wood should fully recede into the background and the wine should soar. 2015-2028+. **92+.**

Demi-Sec

Lanson “Ivory Label” Demi-Sec NV

The new release of the Lanson non-vintage Demi-Sec bottling is really nicely balanced, with a combination of crisp acids and lovely minerality really working nicely with the higher level of *dosage*. The bouquet is deep and bright, offering up scents of ripe peach, tangerine, brioche, a touch of candied violets, fine minerality and a topnote of pastry cream. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really well-balanced, with lovely focus and mid-palate depth,

zesty acids, elegant *mousse*, fairly generous sweetness and lovely mineral drive on the quite precise and long finish. A really lovely bottle of Demi-Sec. 2013-2020+. **91.**

Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut

Delamotte Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

I am not sure when this bottling was disgorged, so it may just be that the wine is still a bit close to its *dégorgement* and had not yet completely settled back into balance, but this wine was showing just a touch generous in terms of *dosage* at the time that I tasted it in early October. Delamotte usually makes one of my favorite non-vintage Blanc de Blancs bottlings, so this may have just been caught at an inopportune moment, as there is really a lovely wine here under the slightly sweeter style. The bouquet is a fine blend of pear, warm bread, a complex base of chalky soil tones, incipient notes of almond paste and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Other than the aforementioned generosity of *dosage*, this is really a fine bottle. 2013-2020+? **90.**

Lanson “Extra Age” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Reims) Disgorged November 2012

The Lanson Extra Age bottlings are all aged a minimum of five years on the lees prior to disgorgement, and the current release is simply superb, wafting from the glass in a pure and complex aromatic constellation of delicious apples, pears, chalky soil tones, bread dough, lemon zest and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and focused, with a still youthful personality, excellent intensity at the core, crisp acids, very elegant *mousse* and lovely balance on the very long and soil-driven finish. Despite this wine having already spent at least five years aging, I would love to tuck it away for another four or five years and really let it develop its secondary layers of complexity, as like all Lanson wines, this is really built for the cellar and will be at its best from 2018 onwards- not that it is a bad drink right now! 2018-2035+. **92+.**

Non-Vintage Brut

Paul Clouet Grand Cru Brut NV (Bouzy)

The new release of Paul Clouet non-vintage Brut is excellent, with plenty of influence of Bouzy pinot noir in evidence on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is deep, complex and toasty, offering up scents of apple, wheat bread, a touch of walnut, a beautiful base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with elegant *mousse*, a fine core of fruit, fine focus and balance and a long, complex and toasty finish. The *dosage* here seems just a touch generous to my palate (and I am pretty enamored of a well-*dosé* bottle of Brut), but the acidity and minerality here frame this nicely and it is only on the tail end of the finish that wine seems just a touch sweet. Good juice, but for those drinking lots of Extra Brut these days, I suspect the *dosage* here will be a touch distracting. 2013-2025. **90.**

Delamotte Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

I have always thought of Delamotte as a Blanc de Blancs specialist, but I really loved the new release of their non-vintage, blended Brut, which includes a percentage of pinot noir. The bouquet is first class, offering up a youthful aromatic blend of apple, lemon, chalky minerality, bread dough, citrus peel and a lovely, floral topnote redolent of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully bright and bouncy, with a lovely core, very refined, elegant *mousse*, excellent soil inflection and a very long, young and poised finish. This is a very

fine drink today, but another year or two of bottle age will allow it to really blossom structurally, as well as add a bit of secondary complexity. Fine juice. 2013-2025+. **91+**.

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV Premier Cru (Damery)

Champagne Alexandre Filaine is found in the village of Damery in the Marne Valley (the next door village Cumières is a bit better known these days), and the wines here are made by Fabrice Gass, who exploits a total of a single hectare of vines- predominantly pinot noir, with slices of both chardonnay and pinot meunier also to be found amongst the various small plots. Monsieur Gass (whose day job is as a member of the winemaking team at Bollinger) makes these wines primarily to share with friends in France and very little are exported, but based on the quality of this superb non-vintage Brut, I would highly recommend making acquaintances! The base wines are fermented in one hundred year-old barrels and do not go through malolactic, with the *cépages* of the current release of Filaine Cuvée Spéciale comprised of forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty-five percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot meunier. The wine is truly exceptional, offering up a deep and very vibrant bouquet of pear, casaba melon, brioche, beautifully complex, chalky soil tones, baking spices and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely creamy on the attack from the barrel fermentation, with brisk acids (from the non-malo), exceptional focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the complex and very soil-driven finish. The new release is a combination of fruit from the 2008 and 2009 vintages. This is a really superb bottle of non-vintage Brut that has personality to burn and will be even better with a year or two of bottle age. 2013-2025+. **92+**.



Lanson “Black Label” Brut NV (Reims) Disgorged October 2012

The current release of Lanson’s Black Label is a lovely bottle of non-vintage Brut, offering up a bright and complex nose of apple, lemon, complex minerality, warm biscuits and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a wide open personality, a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a long, focused and bouncy finish. This is really drinking beautifully right now, but with the house’s non-malo style, there is a lovely chassis of acidity for the wine to age for many years as well. High class juice. 2013-2025+. **90.**

Lanson “Extra Age” Brut NV (Reims) Disgorged May 2012

The new release of Lanson’s fine bottling called “Extra Age” is a young and very, very promising bottle of bubbly. The deep, bright and youthfully zesty nose soars from the glass in a blend of apple, quince, bread dough, stony minerality, orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with very elegant *mousse*, outstanding focus and balance and a very long, snappy and dancing finish. This is already a very serious glass of Champagne today, but I would be inclined to tuck this bottle away in the cellar for a couple of years and really let it blossom! 2013-2025+. **93.**

Marguet Père et Fils “Réserve” Grand Cru Brut NV (Ambonnay)

The new release of Marguet Père et Fils “Réserve” non-vintage Brut is comprised of a fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and chardonnay- all from the family’s vineyards in Ambonnay- and the wine spends three years on its lees prior to disgorgement. The current example was disgorged in October of 2012 and offers up a fine bouquet of apple, tangerine, warm bread, a lovely base of soil, a hint of nutskin and a lovely, smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil inflection, elegant *mousse*, zesty acids and excellent length and grip on the broad-shouldered finish. Fine juice that will be even better with a couple of years in the cellar. 2014-2025. **91+.**

Taittinger “Folies de la Marquetterie” Brut NV (Reims)

The low profile, single vineyard bottling of Folies de la Marquetterie from Taittinger is one of my favorite wines in their excellent lineup, and I was delighted to have the opportunity to drink a bottle of the current release. The wine is a blend of forty-five percent chardonnay and fifty-five percent pinot noir and is aged fully five years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is deep, pure and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, tart orange, bread dough, chalky minerality, spring flowers and faintest hint of the *crème patissière* to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and supremely elegant, with a lovely core, very refined *mousse*, crisp acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long and still fairly youthful finish. This is very tasty today, but four or five years in the cellar is really what it demands and will be stunning when it has had a chance to blossom and develop its secondary layers of complexity. The vineyard here is still relatively young vines, so I realize that the current releases are only a semblance of what this wine is going to be in another decade or two, but this is a very special bottling from Taittinger and I would love to have a case of this particular release in the cellar to start drinking a decade down the road, as this is really a lovely bottle of bubbly! 2017-2040. **92+.**

Non-Vintage Brut Rosé

Billecart-Salmon Brut Rosé NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ) Served from Magnum

After reporting on the French cuvée of the non-vintage Billecart-Salmon Brut Rosé in the last issue (but, not tasting the American version), I was absolutely delighted to see that David Hamburger of the Wine Workshop had selected this wine to serve as the aperitif for our Château

Trotanoy dinner in September. As this was served from magnum, I am guessing that this wine was the previous release here in the states, as the wine clearly showed it had developed some secondary layers with a bit of bottle age and was really drinking splendidly. The outstanding bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined mix of strawberries, tart orange, bread dough, a lovely and quite complex base of minerality, citrus peel and a smoky topnote of impressive delicacy. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, very elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and outstanding focus and balance on the long and classy finish. Lovely juice that is really drinking well at the present time. 2013-2025+. **92.**

Paul Clouet Brut Rosé NV (Bouzy)

I really like Paul Clouet's wines, which show off the lovely pinot noir of Bouzy, but the new release of their Brut Rosé has to be lumped in the good, but not great category. The color is quite a deep cherry red, and the nose is really lovely, as it offers up scents of cherries, blood orange, cinnamon, rye toast, a really lovely base of complex of soil tones and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused on the attack, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids, but the wine tails off a bit in terms of precision on the backend, getting a bit muddled and losing focus. The length and grip here are good and perhaps this is just a function of its present stage of development, but this wine promises fireworks on the nose and stumbles across the finish line on the palate. Maybe bottle age will help it snap back into more precise focus on the backend, as there are some really fine elements here. 2013-2025. **88+?**

Delamotte Brut Rosé NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The current release of the non-vintage Delamotte Brut Rosé is a very pale salmon color and a fine bottle of bubbly. The nose is a lovely blend of dried cherries, cranberries, wheat toast, a complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really nicely balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the bright and wide open finish. The *dosage* here is a touch more generous than in some bottlings these days, but this seems to accentuate the balance of the wine beautifully and buffers the youthful acids and makes the wine a superb drink right out of the blocks. I really like the strong signature of soil in this wine. 2013-2020. **90.**

Lanson Brut Rosé NV (Reims) Disgorged October 2012

The new release of Lanson's non-vintage Brut Rosé is crisp, complex and nicely soil-driven on both the nose and palate. The color is a pale salmon and the bouquet wafts from the glass in a bright and classy blend of tart cherries, a bit of blood orange, lovely minerality, bread dough and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and still quite youthfully structured, with very good mid-palate depth, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and a very long, tangy and complex finish. This is a lovely bottle today, but it will be even better with a couple of years' worth of bottle age. 2013-2025+. **90+.**

Lanson "Extra Age" Brut Rosé NV (Reims) Disgorged November 2012

The additional aging on the lees for the Lanson Extra Age Brut Rosé has produced a wine with more leesy complexity and great length and palate authority than the regular Brut Rosé. The wine is a pale salmon color and offers up a lovely, complex nose of blood orange, dried strawberries, wheat toast, lovely, complex soil tones, dried roses and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a superb core of fruit, brisk acids, very refined *mousse*, excellent focus and balance and a very long, racy and youthful finish. This is still very early days for this serious example of Brut Rosé, and as good as it is to drink today, I would not

hesitate to tuck it away in the cellar for another handful of years and unleash the magic of bottle age. 2016-2040. **92+**.

Lanson “Noble Cuvée” Brut Rosé (Reims)

Lanson’s “Noble Cuvée” Brut Rosé is a non-vintage bottling (the other two renditions of Noble Cuvée are vintage-dated) and it is a lovely wine. The color is a very pale salmon and the bouquet is a lovely blend of apple, tangerine, wheat toast, chalky minerality, orange peel, dried flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and supremely elegant, with excellent mid-palate depth, crisp acids, laser-like focus, tiny, pinpoint bubbles and outstanding length and grip on the bright and still fairly youthful finish. This wine is so beautifully balanced that it is very drinkable today, but I would be inclined to give it a few years in the cellar to allow its structure to more fully relax and the additional layers of complexity to emerge on both the nose and palate. A lovely, lovely wine. 2015-2035. **93+**.

Taittinger Prestige Rosé Brut NV (served from half bottle)

Taittinger is one of the few houses to age their half bottles in halves from the start, rather than decanting off larger formats to produce half bottles at the time of disgorgement. What is nice about this methodology that it inevitably produces half bottles that are a bit more advanced aromatically and flavor-wise than full bottles, and they are often a fine window into the future of the same wine in larger bottles. The new release of Taittinger Prestige Rosé is really delicious right now in half, offering up an excellent nose of cherries, strawberries, orange zest, wheat toast and a lovely base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. This is drinking great out of half and there is no reason to defer one’s gratification with this size format! 2013-2020. **92**.

Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs Brut and Extra Brut

2005 Taittinger Comtes de Champagnes Blanc de Blancs Brut (Reims)

The 2005 Comtes de Champagne is a great wine in the making, and this will be a year where it will not be infanticide to drink the wine on the relatively young side, as the ’05 vintage has provided a truly wide open and inviting profile that will make the wines exceedingly enjoyable at relatively early ages. I had a good week of tasting when I was shown the 2005 Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs while Clovis Taittinger was in town for the Wine Experience, as I had already drunk a brilliant bottle of the 2002 Comtes at our ’02 vintage tasting at the start of the week, and he brought along another bottle of the ’02 to compare and contrast with the 2005! The bouquet on the ’05 Comtes is outstanding, offering up a deep and refined blend of apple, pear, brioche, complex, chalky minerality, orange zest and gentle smokiness in the upper register. With extended breathing, the wine gets very esthery in the glass and is really captivating. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with great complexity, very elegant *mousse*, and excellent length and grip on the vibrant and quite open finish. This is richer than the 2004 Comtes was out of the blocks, but also has excellent raciness and it will certainly age very gracefully, despite being more accessible at an early age. It is an absolutely beautiful wine, which will help keep hands away from the 2002 and 2004 Comtes de Champagne in the cellar! 2013-2035+. **95**.

2004 Champagne Corbon Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut (Avize)

Like all of the vintage-dated bottlings from the Father-Daughter team of Claude and Agnès Corbon, the 2004 Blanc de Blancs was aged fully eight years on its lees prior to disgorgement in January of 2013. The wine is still very young and really needs a few more years

in the cellar to blossom and fully integrate its constituent components, but offers up very good potential in its aromatic mélange of apple, pear, hazelnuts, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones, a touch of vanilla custard and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, crisp acids and very good length and grip on the still very primary finish. This is still a bit too young for drinking, and I would tuck it away for a few more years and allow the various elements here to synthesize, as today it is a bit muddled, but my gut instinct tells me that this will pass with proper bottle age. 2016-2030. **89+**.

2002 Agrapart et Fils “Minéral” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Avize)

The Minéral bottling from Agrapart hails from two sections of vineyards at the very top of the slope in the grand cru villages of Avize and Cramant, with the vines in both parcels over forty years of age. In recent vintages, the Minéral cuvée has evolved into an Extra Brut bottling, and it is possible that this designation was also used for the 2002 vintage, but my tasting sheet listed this as a Brut, so this is how I have listed it here. The 2002 Minéral is showing wide open and ready for primetime drinking, as it wafts from the glass in an aromatic mix of peach, wheat toast, tangerine, lovely soil tones and a touch of wet wool that is reminiscent of young Vouvray! On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and showing some nice, tertiary layers of complexity, with delicate *mousse*, a good core and fine framing acids on the long and slightly briny finish. Good and quite exotic bubbly for near-term drinking. 2013-2018. **90**.

2002 Claude Cazals “Cuvée Clos Cazals” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut (Oger)

I have had the pleasure to taste both the 1996 and 1998 versions of this fine bottling in the recent past, but this was my first exposure to the superb 2002 version and I was very, very impressed with its quality. The complex bouquet is very deep and very refined, wafting from the glass in a complex mélange of pear, tangerine, warm bread, orange peel, complex minerality, just a hint of *crème patissière* and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and crisp, with outstanding mid-palate depth, very elegant *mousse*, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, racy and complex finish of impeccable balance. This is really a stunning bottle of Champagne that is drinking with great style today, but has the spine to carry it far into the future as well. High class juice. 2013-2030+. **93**.

2002 Delamotte Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The 2002 Delamotte Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime is a lovely wine that is now fully into its apogee and drinking very well indeed. The complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, pear, wheat toast, white flowers, a touch of *crème patissière*, lovely minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, well-balanced and racy, with a fine core, crisp acids and very fine length and grip on the focused finish. This is not quite as complex as the very top examples of '02 Blanc de Blancs at this tasting, but it has lots of personality and is a fine drink. 2013-2025+. **91**.

2002 Deutz Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

I had not crossed paths with a bottle of the 2002 Deutz Blanc de Blancs since the fall of 2009, when the wine had just been released, so I was very happy to see this wine included in our lineup for the '02 Blanc de Blancs tastings here in New York. This wine was very tight out of the blocks (quite customary with the house style at Champagne Deutz, which emphasizes sound structure for long-term aging), but, four years on the wine has blossomed beautifully from behind its firm chassis of acidity and is drinking with great breed and style. The superb nose is deep and wide open, offering up scents of delicious apples, fresh-baked wheat bread, lemon zest, chalky

soil tones and a wonderfully aromatic topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly refined, with a great core, frothy, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and exceptional length and grip on the focused and utterly poised finish. The ripeness of the vintage and the inherently racy style of Deutz Blanc de Blancs have synthesized seamlessly into a stunning bottle in 2002! This wine is drinking splendidly today, but has decades of life still ahead of it. 2013-2035. **93.**

2002 Dom Riunart Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2002 Dom Riunart Blanc de Blancs is a very young and tight example of the vintage, which is not too surprising, as this has traditionally been the house style of this fine estate. The bouquet is a very primary blend of apple, orange peel, quite stony minerality, bread dough and a touch of youthful straw tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and snappy, with a very good core of fruit, fine mineral drive, refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex and snappy finish. This still needs several years in the cellar to blossom from behind its girdle of acidity, but it will be a lovely wine in the fullness of time. 2020-2045+. **92.**

2002 Pascal Doquet Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

This was the third time I had tasted the 2002 Pascal Doquet Blanc de Blancs bottling from his vineyards in Mesnil-sur-Oger, and as my score has consistently marched upwards with each pass through the wine, it seems that my initial objections to the oak treatment in this wine (which is what kept the score down initially) has lessened as the oak has better integrated into the wine with bottle age. The bouquet today is complex and shows plenty of personality in its blend of pear, warm bread, almonds, chalky minerality, a touch of oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still just a touch on the chunky side, with a good core, very sound acidity, pinpoint bubbles and a long, intense and complex finish. This is crafted in a more forceful style, but it is aging very gracefully and getting better with each passing year. I clearly underestimated this wine out of the blocks, as it is turning into a very good glass of bubbly with cellaring. 2013-2023. **90.**

2002 Pierre Gimmonet et Fils “Millésime de Collection” Special Club Vieilles Vignes Brut

I do not get to taste the wines from Pierre Gimmonet et Fils with any regularity, so I was quite delighted to have an opportunity to try their 2002 old vine Special Club bottling. The wine is comprised of one hundred percent chardonnay, with fifty-four percent hailing from the village of Cramant, thirty-one percent from Chouilly and fifteen percent from Cuis. The wine was aged for five years on the lees and received a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The 2002 Millésime de Collection is lovely, delivering a complex bouquet of pear, peach, wheat toast, a nice touch of almond and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open, with a superb core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, fine framing acids and very good length and grip on the generous finish. This will not make old bones, but for drinking over the next seven or eight years, this is an absolutely delightful bottle of bubbly. Fine juice. 2013-2020+. **91.**

2002 A. R. Lenoble “Collection Rare” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Chouilly)

The 2002 A. R. Lenoble “Collection Rare” Blanc de Blancs is a very, very good wine, albeit a bit new oaky in style. The deep and complex nose offers up a ripe blend of pear, clementine, chalky soil tones, smoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with elegant *mousse*, a good core of fruit, crisp acids and very good length and grip on the wide open, but nicely balanced finish. If one does not mind a bit of new wood in their bubbly, this is certainly a fine glass for drinking over the next ten to twelve years. 2013-2025+. **92.**

2002 Bruno Michel Blanc de Blancs “Cuvée Pauline” Brut (Pierry)

This was the first wine I had ever tasted from Bruno Michel and I found it quite good, albeit rather oaky in style from its sojourn in older barrels for its *elevage*. The bouquet is a rather exotic blend of passion fruit, tangerine, very nice minerality, smoke and a bit of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and fine length and grip on the slightly oaky finish. The oak influence here is pretty noticeable, but there is very good wine underneath and the wood is not excessive in any way, so if one does not mind some wood in their bubbly, there is a lot to like here. 2013-2025. **90.**

2002 Pierre Moncuit Blanc de Blancs “Cuvée Nicole Moncuit” V.V. Brut (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The Cuvée Nicole Moncuit is produced from the oldest parcel of vines owned by the Moncuit family in Mesnil, with these vines in excess of one hundred years of age. The wine is aged seven years on the lees and received a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The 2002 is drinking beautifully, showing off the very elegant house style of Pierre Moncuit in its complex bouquet of apple, pear, pastry cream, chalky soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately concentrated at the core, with great elegance and complexity, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the focused, poised and wide open finish. This does not possess quite the same depth of fruit in reserve at the core as is found in the very finest 2002 Blanc de Blancs, but for drinking over the next seven to ten years, there is an awful lot of pleasure to be had in this bottle. Fine juice. 2013-2020+. **92.**

2002 Pierre Peters “Cuvée Spéciale les Chétillons” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

I really liked the 2002 les Chétillons bottling from Pierre Peters, which was particularly impressive in its complexity on both the nose and palate, and the only (very slight) reservation I have with the wine is that it is not as solid at the core as the very finest examples of the vintage. The bouquet is first rate, wafting from the glass in a very elegant mélange of pear, apple, chalky soil tones, bread dough and gentle notes of *crème patissière* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, frothy and refined, with a rather modest core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and very good length and grip on the long finish that closes with a touch of backend butteriness from the wood. Fine juice, but not quite in the top division. 2013-2025. **91.**

2002 Ployez-Jacquemart Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Ludes)

In our lineup of 2002 Blanc de Blancs, the Extra Brut bottling from Ployez-Jacquemart really stood out for its still quite youthful personality. The bouquet is deep, minerally and still fairly reticent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, quince, kaleidoscopic minerality, warm bread and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite zesty, with a rock solid core of fruit, very elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and great cut and grip on the very minerally complex finish. This is still a bit on the early side to be drinking this wine, which really needs three or four more years of bottle age to fully blossom. It is a very fine wine in the making, but give it a little bit more bottle age! 2015-2035. **92+.**

2002 Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs Brut (Épernay) English Cuvée

This was the first time I had crossed paths with a bottle of the 2002 Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs and the wine is excellent. This particular bottle had been sourced in London, and I am not sure if there is any difference in *dosage* for the US and UK markets, so I have at least noted that this wine originated in the UK. The wine is absolutely superb, wafting from the glass in a fine and toasty blend of apple, pear, warm bread, complex, chalky minerality, smokiness and a nice, youthful topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and perfectly balanced, with a fine core, tiny, pinpoint bubbles, crisp acids and simply superb length

and grip on the poised and refined finish. A great vintage for this consistently excellent cuvée. 2013-2035. **93.**

1999 Lanson “Noble Cuvée” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Reims)

It had been eighteen months since I last tasted the 1999 Noble Cuvée Blanc de Blancs, and the wine is blossoming nicely and is clearly even better than I felt it was back in Reims in the spring of 2012. I brought a bottle of this wine to our 2002 tasting, but it was sadly corked, which was too bad, as I really wanted to see how it performed in a lineup of heavy hitters from that renowned vintage. However, the team at Lanson kindly hustled another bottle my way in time for inclusion for this report, and I am very happy that they did, as the wine is clearly superior to my initial impressions on it last spring. The bouquet is deep, complex and very, very classy, with a sense of gravitas that only the very finest Champagnes offer in its blend of delicious apple, pear, brioche, a touch of the *crème patissière* to come, complex, chalky soil tones, gentle notes of smokiness, lemon zest and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off stunning mid-palate concentration, with crisp acids, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the perfectly balanced and zesty finish. This is already drinking very well, but like all Lanson wines, further bottle age will be richly rewarded. A dynamite bottle. 2015-2040. **93+.**



Vintage-Dated Brut

2006 Marguet Père et Fils “Vintage Brut” Grand Cru (Ambonnay)

The 2006 Marguet Père et Fils “Vintage Brut” is an outstanding bottle of wine that is now starting to open up and drink very well, but with the structure and superb balance to age gracefully for many, many years to come. I last tasted this wine about fifteen months ago and found it pretty tight and seemingly modest in mid-palate depth, but today it is quite clear that this was simply a function of its youth and I certainly underestimated this lovely wine. Today the wine is absolutely singing, soaring from the glass in a bright and complex nose of apple, pear, fresh-baked bread, a lovely base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and a bit of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now shows the lovely mid-palate concentration that Ambonnay fruit is famous for, with crisp acids, very refined *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a very long, poised and well-balanced finish. It is not a crime to be opening bottles of this lovely wine today, but another year or two in the cellar will be rewarded with secondary layers of complexity and a bit more softening of the fine girdle of acidity here. Fine, fine juice! 2014-2030. **92+**.

2006 Taittinger Brut Millésimé (Reims)

The new release of the 2006 Taittinger Brut Millésimé is comprised of a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir and was aged six years on the lees prior to disgorgement in January of 2013. Ninety-five percent of the grapes for this cuvée were sourced from grand cru vineyards. The wine is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a young and refined nose of apple, brioche, a touch of tangerine, complex, stony minerality, citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows off superb mid-palate depth, with bright acids, excellent focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and great length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. This looks likely to be one of the strongest examples of Taittinger Brut Millésimé in several years. Fine, fine juice. 2013-2035+. **93**.

2004 Bollinger Grande Année Brut (Aÿ)

The 2004 Bollinger Grande Année is a very, very fine example of the vintage, with the Bollinger style of richness and breed beautifully dovetailing with the inherent raciness of '04. The bouquet is deep and refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, clementine, wheat toast, a complex base of stony minerality, a whisper of honeycomb and a lovely, smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with brisk acids, excellent focus and grip, very elegant *mousse* and outstanding focus and grip on the very long and balanced finish. This is already drinking very, very well indeed and will not demand further cellaring to start to sing in the glass, but has the balance and underlying chassis of acidity to also age very gracefully indeed. Fine juice. 2013-2030+. **93**.

2002 Paul Bara “Special Club” Brut Millésime (Bouzy)

This was the first time that I had crossed paths with the 2002 Paul Bara Special Club bottling, so I do not have any information on the *cépages* of this cuvée in this vintage. In any case, the wine is excellent, offering up a complex bouquet of white peaches, apple, a touch of orange zest, warm bread, a refined base of soil and a nice topnote of gentle smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely balanced, with a fine core, ripe acids, very elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the focused and *à point* finish. Good juice. 2013-2025+. **92**.

2002 Lanson “Gold Label” Brut Vintage (Reims)

The 2002 Lanson “Gold Label” Brut Vintage is a young and very lovely example of this fine year. The pure and vibrant bouquet wafts from the glass in a mélange of apple, tart orange, a complex base of soil, warm bread, citrus zest and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long and classy, albeit youthful finish. As this wine does not go through malolactic fermentation (as is the case with all these fine Lanson bottlings), it is still pretty early days for the 2002 Gold Label, and I would be inclined to keep this in a cool corner of the cellar for another five years and really let the wine blossom. It will be dynamite when it is ready to drink and should last and last. 2018-2035+. **92+**.

2002 J. Lasalle “Cuvée Angéline” Brut (Chigny-les-Rosés)

The Cuvée Angéline from Champagne Lasalle was first crafted by Jules Lasalle in the 1973 vintage, which also happened to be the birth year of his granddaughter Angéline, for whom the family’s *Tête de Cuvée* is named. The wine is a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay and offers up the very elegant and refined style that has made the Lasalle family’s wines such favorites amongst Champagne *cognoscenti* for many, many years. The 2002 Cuvée Angéline offers up a beautiful and quite *à point* bouquet of pear, peach, brioche, chalky soil tones, a gentle touch of nutskin and a lovely dollop of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and wide open, with excellent mid-palate depth, very refined *mousse* and simply outstanding length and grip on the elegant and perfectly balanced finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Champagne for drinking over the next ten years or so. 2013-2023+. **92+**.

2002 Piper-Heidsieck “Rare” Brut (Reims)

The 2002 Piper-Heidsieck Rare is an absolutely stellar example of this fine vintage and the wine is drinking beautifully well at age eleven. The bouquet is deep, pure and utterly refined, as it wafts from the glass in a complex mélange of apple, pear, lemon, *crème patissière*, a marvelously complex base of soil tones, brioche and a potpourri of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a superb core of pure fruit, lovely soil inflection, very elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the extremely elegant and wide open finish. This is drinking superbly well today, but shows all of the requisite structural elements to carry it for at least the next couple of decades. It remains the single finest bottling from Piper-Heidsieck that I have ever tasted. 2013-2035+. **95+**.

2002 Louis Roederer “Cristal” Brut

It had been four years since I last had a bottle of the 2002 Cristal, and time has seemingly not even touched this magical vintage of Cristal and the wine still is begging for another five years in the cellar to really allow its secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. The absolutely beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a vibrant and still youthful constellation of apple, lemon, complex, limestone minerality, fresh-baked bread, a dollop of orange peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with stunning mid-palate depth, hauntingly refined *mousse*, bright, zesty acids and simply brilliant length and grip on the focused and perfectly balanced finish. This is probably the greatest young vintage of Cristal I have had the pleasure to taste, and while it is a glorious glass of bubbly today, the real fireworks here are still at least four or five years away! A great, great wine. 2018-2050. **97**.

2002 Vilmart et Cie “Grand Cellier d’Or” Brut (Rilly-la-Montagne)

The 2002 Vilmart et Cie “Grand Cellier d’Or” is a very nice example of the vintage, with a discreetly oaky personality and fine complexity and breed. The wine is a blend of seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent pinot noir, with all of the *vins clairs* spending ten months in barrel prior to blending. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a gently oaked constellation of apple, pear, pastry cream, lovely minerality and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows off fine depth at the core, with tiny, pinpoint bubbles, crisp acids, fine balance and very good, but not great length on the focused and classy finish. The oak here is done very nicely, but it is a constituent component of the wine’s profile and some may find this more attractive than others. It is a very good wine by any stretch of the imagination, but, at least to my palate, does not have that extra dimension on the backend of the very finest 2002s. 2013-2025+. **91+**.

2000 Lanson Noble Cuvée Brut (Reims)

Lanson’s Noble Cuvée must be one of the lowest profile *Tête de Cuvées* out there in the market these days, but it is also one of the most profound and the 2000 is a wine that is well worth a search of the market place to secure for the cellar. The deep, beautifully complex and utterly suave nose offers up scents of apple, tangerine, brioche, a very classy base of soil tones, almonds and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very complex, with a great core of fruit, utterly refined, pinpoint bubbles, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and perfectly poised finish. As the Lanson house style eschews malolactic fermentation, this wine is bright and bouncy at age thirteen and should age gracefully for many decades. A great bottle! 2013-2040+. **94**.

1995 Bollinger R. D. Brut (Aÿ)

Tasting the 1995 Bollinger R. D. alongside the 2004 Grande Année and it is very easy to see that these are very similar wines that are only removed by nine years of bottle age. The complex and very classy bouquet on the ’95 R. D. offers up a toasty blend of apple, peach, honeycomb, brioche, a complex base of soil and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely *à point*, with crisp acids, lovely mid-palate intensity, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the focused and very poised finish. Lovely juice for drinking over the next fifteen to twenty years. 2013-2030+. **93+**.

IN MEMORY OF PATRICK BIZE



On the 20th of October of this year, Burgundy lost one of its most colorful and beloved winegrowers, when Patrick Bize passed away from complications sustained during an automobile accident. All of us who knew Patrick deeply mourn his untimely passing. He was sixty-one years of age and leaves behind his wife, Chisa and their two children. Patrick was driving when he suffered a heart attack, which ultimately caused the accident. He lapsed into a coma and sadly never recovered. He was the fourth generation of his family to head the family domaine of Simon

Bize et Fils in Savigny-lès-Beaune, one of the finest estates to be found anywhere in the Côte d'Or, which was founded by his great grandfather, Simon Bize in 1868. The Bize domaine was really built up over the course of Patrick's grandfather's era, from the close of the nineteenth century through the 1920s, as this was when much of the estate's twenty-two hectares of vineyard land were assembled. Patrick was the first generation of Bize men to run the domaine who were not named Simon, as his father and grandfather both shared the name with the family scion and founder of the estate. Domaine Simon Bize et Fils is one of the most important historical estates in all of Burgundy, as it was one of the first domaines to begin estate-bottling a portion of their production, as Patrick's grandfather was already selling of a sizable percentage of each vintage in bottle to private clients prior to World War II, and Patrick's father greatly expanded the percentage sold in bottle during the 1950s and 1960s, so that by the time of the 1972 vintage, the entire Domaine Bize production was estate-bottled. Patrick was born in 1952 and joined his father full-time at the domaine in the 1978 vintage, and he had been head of the domaine since his father Simon's retirement in 1988.

Patrick Bize was one of the most thoughtful and funny *vignerons* in all of Burgundy, with a wry sense of humor and an astute awareness of the world around him. He was never formally trained in oenology, preferring to learn from his father and from a generation of great Burgundy *vignerons* with whom he apprenticed in his early years, including folks like Henri Mayer, Jacques Seysses, Jacques d'Angerville and Hubert de Montille. Patrick was very much a traditionalist in the cellars, as he was a great advocate of whole cluster fermentation and never was tempted to alter his family's classic style of wines even in the go-go decade of the 1990s, when lots of new wood and complete de-stemming were the fashions of the moment. As he once said, "why would I want to alter the style of the wines here- which were good enough to make the domaine well-known in my father's and grandfather's days- just because some people today want wines that are easy to understand right away... these would not be Domaine Bize wines, and my father and grandfather have left me enough bottles from their days that are drinking so beautifully now that I would have to be absolutely crazy to consider any changes!" However, his traditional approach in the cellars was always flexible, as one of his favorite sayings was "there are no rules". He would do what the wine required- partial or complete destemming if the stems were not ripe enough in a given year, fast or slow fermentations depending again upon the year, filtration or not depending upon how clear the wine fell after racking and a myriad of other nods to flexibility and practicality in the cellars. He was a great partisan of old vines- like so many greats in

Burgundy- and he clearly always believed that great wine was produced out in the vineyards, not down in the cellars.

I can vividly recall my annual visits to Patrick in the cold and damp of foggy November in Burgundy, where Patrick would always light a bit of fire in the spacious hearth in the tasting area of the cellars, and he would so often poke at the fire quietly while we would taste through the newest vintage ready to be shown in the cellars. He was always a modest and self-deprecating man, full of warmth and great humor, but never one to boast about the superb quality of his wines- though one always had the sense that, like any true artist, he was acutely aware of their excellence and had no doubts even in the face of a sometimes uncomprehending wine world. We live in a day and age that does not always champion classically-structured wines from underdog appellations like Savigny-lès-Beaune- finding it far easier to jump on the bandwagon of tonier villages like Vosne-Romanée or Chambolle-Musigny- and I have always been of the opinion that so many Burgundy lovers missed the boat with Patrick Bize's brilliant wines. This is not to say that the domaine has not had its cadre of very, very passionate fans since the very early days, as I have often tasted in the cellars here with great Burgundy connoisseurs who truly understood and cherished Patrick's wines, and their level of enthusiasm for the style and magic of the Bize wines is certainly not often to be found mirrored in the crowds found in the hallowed cellars of the most famous domaines further north. Savigny in general, and Patrick in particular, did not produce "bling-bling wines" for the cozily affluent Burgundy aficionado, but rather classic old school wines that aged brilliantly and recalled a simpler era of Burgundy appreciation, when all it took was imagination, patience, a cool cellar and a good palate to ferret out the best that the region had to offer.

My love affair with the wines of Savigny-lès-Beaune, appropriately enough, began with a wine from Domaine Simon Bize et Fils, as it certainly took many years of visiting and drinking Burgundy before the light of Savigny finally went on for me. I was shopping for older Burgundies on a list of an English wine merchant many, many years ago and spotted a cache of bottles of the 1972 Savigny-lès-Beaune "les Vergelesses" from Domaine Bize, which happens to be their finest wine in my opinion (not that I knew this at the time). The bottles had just been purchased as part of a large cellar of older wines, and not too surprisingly, they were still on the list a few weeks later, when everything else from the cellar had been gobbled up by other clients. I ordered six of the bottles, as I was not sure how well a 1972 les Vergelesses might be still holding up at the close of the 1990s (yes, I was still very much a Savigny green-horn in those days), and impatiently waited for the bottles to settle in after their arrival here in New York. I am sure I opened the first bottle too soon after travel, as I only gave the wine about three weeks to recover from its trans-Atlantic voyage, but it was very clear from the first glass that this was a beautiful bottle of wine that was still at its apogee of peak maturity and was in no danger of sliding into decline anytime in the immediate future. I quickly sent out an email to the UK merchant to see if any of the other bottles still remained, as he had received a bit more than a case from the original cellar purchase, and luckily, more than a month after I had placed my original order, I was able to secure the final nine bottles of this great, great wine! As the wine had a chance to more fully recover from shipping, it became better and better, offering up a gloriously candied, red fruity personality, stunning soil signature, wonderful floral aromatics and a degree of elegant complexity and complete, silky refinement on the palate that would be an absolute shock to those who only know Savigny in its chewy and slightly rustic stages of youth.

Appropriately, the very last bottle, drunk six or seven years ago, was the best of all, as the wine had just continued to cruise along and develop even more perfumed complexity as it rested in my cellar. It remains one of the most beautiful bottles of Burgundy I have ever drunk.

Patrick Bize's passing is a very sad moment for the world of Burgundy. I never really got to know him as well as I would have liked, as I only began visiting and tasting with him at the family domaine in the last ten years, and I missed an opportunity by not stopping by the cellars here in Savigny earlier on in my travels to the Côte d'Or. For the last several years, I have always left the Bize cellars after a visit with Patrick wishing I had time to get together with he and his wife Chisa over a good meal and really get to know one another on a more intimate level. For Patrick was a man of enormous heart, which he often wore unrepentantly on his sleeve, and one could always sense the inherent goodness of the man as one spent time with him. As was often his way, he liked to hide his feelings behind a veil of humor- at least to folks like myself who did not know him as well as he deserved- and whether he was quipping jokes about labor strikes being the national sport of France or slapping his own Corton-Charlemagne label over the one from Christophe Roumier (one of Patrick's closest friends since his school days) that graced my tasting book- "you have to put the label of the better wine on your book!"- his great sense of humor is always one of the first things remarked upon when Patrick's name comes up in conversation amongst those who knew him. But, it was always crystal clear that he was a man of conviction with a strong moral compass and very clear insights into the justices and injustices of the age in which we live, and that below his sometimes gallows' humor lay a heart that beat to try and right the wrongs of an uncaring world. I am sure that he was a loving and warm family man, and that his family will never fully heal from the loss of Patrick at such an early age. For those of us who knew him best through the medium of his art, we will still have his beautiful wines to keep alive and poignant our memories of this great man, and these memories will never grow stale or lose their vibrancy of color as the years lengthen, as there will still be all of those beautiful wines carrying on, beating with the same heart that was so tragically stilled on October the 20th. We will miss you Patrick.