

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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RENÉ ROSTAING'S BEAUTIFULLY CLASSIC EXAMPLES OF CÔTE-RÔTIE



René Rostaing is one of Côte-Rôtie's finest classical producers (albeit, with a few modern twists, as we shall see), and yet after a decade or two in the limelight, beginning in the latter half of the 1980s, his wines have slipped a bit below the radar of most traditionally-minded Rhône wine lovers. By most accounts, Monsieur Rostaing is perfectly fine with the adulation moving elsewhere, as he is a fairly private man who is most interested in his wines and could do without all of the trappings that come along with winemaking superstardom. I was very familiar with the Rostaing Côte-Rôties at the start of his rise in reputation, as the first wines that I ever sold from his estate were his superb 1985s, which continue to drink beautifully to this day. I followed his wines quite closely during the magical run of vintages in Côte-Rôtie during the latter half of the 1980s and early 1990s, but then lost track of them a bit for a handful of vintages, only to once again start to buy and taste a couple of vintages from

Monsieur Rostaing in the late 1990s. I was quite surprised to taste these wines in the early 2000s, as they were far more marked by new oak than I could ever recall of the wines from the span from the 1985 through 1991 vintages, and I assumed (erroneously as it turns out) that Domaine Rostaing was simply another producer from the northern Rhône who had embraced a more modern and new oaky style of wine that was endemic in the region in this epoch. Consequently, when I was invited by Mannie Berk of The Rare Wine Company to participate in a pair of splendid verticals of René Rostaing's top bottlings of Côte-Rôtie, I initially had to ask Mannie if it would be worthwhile, as I still thought that the Rostaing wines were now firmly entrenched in the modernist camp in the region and would not be of particular interest to subscribers of the newsletter. Happily, in his classically understated manner, Mannie suggested that I might be very pleasantly surprised, and indeed he was right, as the wines showed utterly classical in style and were truly superb examples of old school Côte-Rôtie.

René Rostaing has been producing Côte-Rôtie for far longer than I ever imagined, as his rise to prominence in the decade of the 1980s (on the strength of Robert Parker's very strong endorsement of his wines beginning in the middle of that decade) was not at the start of his winemaking career in the region, but was tardy by more than two decades! Monsieur Rostaing was born in 1946 (a true Baby-Boomer) and produced his first vintage of wine from his tiny .22

hectare parcel of vines in the Côte Blonde vineyard in 1971, so by the time he was “discovered” in the 1985 vintage, he had already had more than a dozen vintages under his belt! His original plot in Côte Blonde came from his grandfather, Jean-Pierre Buffens (who was a very respected *vigneron* in his own right), and in 1977, he added his grandfather’s equally tiny slice of a quarter hectare of vines in the La Landonne vineyard and produced his first bottling from this *lieu à dit* in that vintage. Monsieur Rostaing’s wife, Christiane, also comes from a very serious winegrowing extended family in Côte-Rôtie, as her father is Albert Dervieux of Domaine Dervieux-Thaize, who was the President of the growers syndicate in Côte-Rôtie for the last thirty-three years of his long career (he retired after the 1990 vintage), and also one of the finest producers the region has seen in the post-war years. Additionally, her uncle was none other than Marius Gentaz of Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux, the finest of all producers in this region during the course of his long and illustrious career. Both of these gentlemen, upon their retirements, handed over the reins of their parcels of vines to Monsieur Rostaing, so that today, René Rostaing has a very significant roster of old vines in several of the very finest *lieux à dits* in the heart of the appellation and exploits fully seven and a half hectares of vines on the slopes in Côte-Rôtie (with another hectare of vines up on the plateau) and another twenty *ares* in neighboring Condrieu. It is a far cry from the quarter hectare of vines each in Côte Blonde and La Landonne that he began his winegrowing career with all those years ago!

Given the very tiny parcels that René Rostaing began with in Côte-Rôtie- albeit, in two of the appellation’s greatest *terroirs*- it is not surprising that winegrowing was not Monsieur Rostaing’s primary source of income at the start of his career. His “day job” for several decades was in the world of real estate and he was a property manager of several apartment complexes in the region, with his offices in nearby Condrieu. For many years, he felt that it was indispensable for a *vigneron* in Côte-Rôtie to have another, steadier job to support the financial health of the wine enterprise, as prices for wines in the region did not really start to tick up to the subsistence level here until the latter half of the decade of the 1980s, and the price for a bottle of Côte-Rôtie back when Monsieur Rostaing began in the 1970s was so low that the wine was often served in *pichet* in the local cafés in Ampuis, rather than bottled, as it was considered for many decades to simply be a very good *vin ordinaire* in the world wine market. Happily for winegrowers in Côte-Rôtie, things have changed dramatically since those days and today, the prices are robust enough for top examples of the appellation that the migratory exodus that the region experienced in the pre-war years and up through the 1970s (when a majority of young men in the region sought work elsewhere, rather than taking to the steep vineyard slopes of Côte-Rôtie in the hopes of making a living), has reversed in the last fifteen to twenty years and one now often hears of new *vignerons* arriving from previous careers in nearby Lyon to try their hand at producing Côte-Rôtie.

When René Rostaing’s father-in-law, Albert Dervieux retired in 1990 and handed over his fine lineup of more than three hectares of vines in some of the top vineyards in Côte-Rôtie to René, it was finally time for Monsieur Rostaing to consider retirement from the real estate business and focus all of his time and energies on producing his wines, so that the magical 1991 vintage can be considered the first Rostaing vintage where the producer was a “full-time” *vigneron* (though he did not fully retire from the real estate world until 2000). His uncle, Marius Gentaz, retired following the 1993 vintage, with his small holdings of 1.2 hectares of very old vines in great vineyards also passing into the hands of Monsieur Rostaing, so that today, René

Rostaing is one of the larger vineyard owners in Côte-Rôtie and certainly has one of the finest arrays of holdings in great *terroirs* of anyone in the appellation, with perhaps only the Guigal family able to rival the Rostaing roster of vines in the very finest vineyards. Though he continues to produce only two single vineyard bottlings, his La Landonne and Côte Blonde bottlings, this is certainly not the full extent of his great vineyards, and he could also bottle single vineyard cuvées, if he had the mind, from some of the other great *terroirs* on the roasted slope, including La Viallière (which his father-in-law, Albert Dervieux bottled as a single vineyard), Côte Brune (bottled on occasion by Marius Gentaz on its own) and Fongeant, which lies just above Côte Brune on the steep slope.

Before discussing the specific vineyard holdings today of René Rostaing, this might be a good place to pause for a moment and discuss the differences between specific *lieux à dits* in the heart of the Côte-Rôtie appellation and the two distinct sectors of vines that rise up above and flank the village center of Ampuis, for Monsieur Rostaing is very passionate about the differentiation between the two and can be quite vocal in his dislike for the broader brushstrokes that many use to discuss the different *terroirs* of the appellation. Since the rise of Côte-Rôtie to international prominence in the latter half of the 1980s (and perhaps predating this by a decade or two), it has been convenient to discuss the northerly and southerly halves of the finest coterie of vineyard hillsides that tower over Ampuis by giving them the names of Côte Brune and Côte Blonde, despite the fact that these are in fact the names of two specific vineyard sites. Think of this as an attempt to make sense of the variations of soil types that are quite clear when one walks the vineyards in Côte-Rôtie, and I am sure that the adoption of these two names for the two distinctive areas is reflective of the similar division of the vineyard areas of the Côte d'Or into the Côte de Beaune and the Côte de Nuits. For there is a very real distinction between the two sides of the central vineyards of Côte-Rôtie, with the demarcation being the steep valley of the *Chemin de la Côte Blonde* which cuts its way up in a serpentine fashion into the steep hillside vineyards from the southerly edge of the town of Ampuis and runs between the two vineyards of Baleyat and Lancement, with the former effectively the last of the northerly sector and the latter the first of the southerly sector of Côte-Rôtie and the *terroirs* on each side of this narrow track are quite a bit different. As Monsieur Rostaing has several vineyard parcels in the two *lieux à dits* of Côte Brune and Côte Blonde, it is understandable that he takes great umbrage in the use of these two vineyard names by most commentators to denote the two different sectors of vines. I would suggest that it would make more sense, if the two vineyard sectors were identified as “Côte de Brune” and “Côte de Blonde” in the future, as this would allow the historical association of the last several decades to continue with the two areas, while retaining the traditional names of the two vineyards for those specific parcels of vines. I will use those terms to discuss the two different geological sectors above Ampuis, and retain the proper names for their respective vineyards.

The reason that the Côte de Brune and the Côte de Blonde have been differentiated from each other for at least the last thirty or forty years is that there are some quite distinct variations in the typical soil types of the two sectors. All of the vineyards of Côte-Rôtie are primarily based on steep slopes of mica-schist, with these very stony soils infusing the wines of the appellation with their unique and superb personalities. However, there are important general differences between the relative composition of these mica-schist soils in each sector. The more northerly Côte de Brune region has a very strong vein of iron in the soils, and often will have quite a bit

more clay as well interspersed in the crumbling hillsides here, and these two added variables typically will produce wines that are a bit more robust, structured and long-lived than those from further south. In the old days, these would be considered the more “masculine” *terroirs* of Côte-Rôtie. In the Côte de Blonde, on the other side of the narrow valley, the clay and iron are generally replaced with sandy soils to go along with the crumbling mica-schist, and the wines in broad brushstrokes tend to be a bit more floral and elegant out of the blocks and more ethereal at full maturity than their counterparts from the Côte de Brune. Consequently, the northerly sector tends to have deeper colored and more “brown” soils (from the clay and iron) and the southerly sector more white soils, and it is quite easy to see how the two names originally came to migrate from their particular vineyards and come to denote the two different areas. These are, of course, generalities, and as such, are only useful as far as they go and winemaking styles can play an equally decisive role in determining a particular wine’s personality, but there are very real differences of general soil composition between the two sectors and differentiating between the two has not lost its utility simply because it has been ill-advisedly tied to the names of specific vineyard sites and caused a lot of confusion in the market and some irritation on the part of many *vignerons*.

In any event, René Rostaing’s vineyard roster is every bit as impressive as an estate such as Domaine Dujac in the Côte de Nuits, as he has a very healthy portfolio of great *terroirs* with which to work. For starters, looking first at his holdings in the Côte de Brune, he now has nearly 1.6 hectares of vines in the small and fabled La Landonne vineyard (just up the slope from the northern end of the town of Ampuis), with just over a quarter hectare of these vines having come from his uncle, Marius Gentaz in 1994 and having been planted to eighty year-old Petite Sérine vines. He already had a bit over one hectare in La Landonne that he had purchased over the years, plus his original quarter hectare from his grandfather. He also has 1.2 hectares of vines in the excellent Côte de Brune vineyard of La Viallière that lies a bit further north of the Ampuis border in the next hamlet of Verenay. A third of these vines are from his father-in-law, Albert Dervieux, with eighty percent of Monsieur Dervieux’s parcel planted to one hundred year-old Petite Sérine vines. The other two-thirds of the Rostaing holdings in La Viallière are in a parcel that he acquired and planted in the mid-1980s, so these are not as old as the Dervieux plot, but are now getting to a very good age as they close in on their thirtieth birthdays. Additionally, Monsieur Rostaing now has more than three-quarters of a hectare of vines in the superb vineyard of Côte Brune, which lies on the steep hillside that rises up right above the center of Ampuis and where the Guigal family’s La Turquie bottling hails from, as La Turquie is a trademarked name of the cuvée, rather than a vineyard name. Of these holdings in Côte Brune, a third of a hectare came from Marius Gentaz and was planted to old Petite Sérine, a quarter hectare came from Albert Dervieux and was also old vine Petite Sérine and twenty *ares* were purchased by Monsieur Rostaing prior to acquiring these other parcels from his family. He also now has a full hectare and a half of vines in the vineyard of Fongeat (right above the *lieu à dit* of Côte Brune on the hillside), with one hectare having come from Albert Dervieux. There is also a fine plot of sixty *ares* in the vineyard of Leyat, (which lies alongside of the Côte Brune vineyard on the slope, just to the north). Fifty *ares* of this holding formerly belonged to Marius Gentaz and were planted to Petite Sérine around 1960, with the other ten *ares* hailing from the former-Dervieux holdings and planted to Petite Sérine from around 1925!



To round out his vineyard parcels in the Côte de Brune sector, Monsieur Rostaing has forty *ares* in the *lieu à dit* of La Plomb, which lies up above La Viallière, but this is not one of his plum holdings, as this vineyard has a more northerly exposition and is not particularly steep, as are neighboring La Viallière and Grand Places. In addition to all of his superb parcels in the northerly sector of the Côte de Brune, René Rostaing also has his great vineyard parcels of the Côte Blonde, which lies just on the southerly side of the gorge that demarcates the two sectors, and where one can also find the Guigal vineyards that comprise La Mouline (again, a brand name, rather than an official vineyard name). He now has nearly a full hectare of vines in Côte Blonde, with about a quarter of the vines in excess of eighty-five years of age and the others a fair bit younger. Adding to his original parcel of twenty-two *ares* that he received from his grandfather in Côte Blonde in 1971, he has added small pieces from both his uncle and his father-in-law, as well as purchasing a twenty *ares* piece in 2000. The thirty *ares* from Albert Dervieux are in the subplot of La Garde in Côte Blonde, which used to be bottled on their own by Monsieur Dervieux as a single vineyard back in the day. Within Côte Blonde lies the only sections planted to viognier (often interspersed with the syrah) of Monsieur Rostaing's, as he has eight *ares* of this white grape, and consequently, the Rostaing Côte Blonde is the only Côte-Rôtie cuvée from the domaine that is not one hundred percent syrah. I should note that there was a tiny parcel of viognier planted in one of the old Marius Gentaz parcels in the Côte de Brune, but I do not know if this was replanted to syrah when René Rostaing took over, or if it still finds its way into the regular bottling in infinitesimally small percentages. His total holdings now in the great *terroir* of Côte Blonde are ninety-five *ares*, and the single vineyard bottling that he

produces from his vines here will typically include up to five percent viognier. Monsieur Rostaing also owns a half hectare of vines further south in the appellation, on the hillside above the tiny hamlet of Tupin, a hectare of vines up on the plateau in Boucharey, as well as twenty *ares* in Condrieu. A very impressive roster of vineyards!

Not all of the vineyard parcels that he acquired from his father-in-law and uncle were in great shape when they were added to the domaine's roster of vines, so Monsieur Rostaing has had to replant the thirty-five *ares* parcel of Petite Sérine in the Gentaz section of Côte Brune, as these vines were old and virused and he felt that they could not be rescued. René Rostaing is well-known for his lack of enthusiasm for the Petite Sérine strain of syrah in any case, as he has long preferred a mix of local clones for the planting of his own vineyards, reasoning that this increases the genetic mix in the vineyards and decreases subsequent viral risk in the vines. This is not to say that he has routinely sought out the high-yielding clones of syrah that are popular in some circles, but he has long been one of the region's staunchest defenders of locally-cultivated clones of syrah over the old strain of Petite Sérine. His outspoken public stance on this issue has certainly put him in the minority of *vignerons* in Côte-Rôtie in recent times, and I cannot profess to have enough knowledge of the subject to really know where the greater truth lies regarding Petite Sérine, but I will note that most of the truly great classic examples of Côte-Rôtie I have had over the years have been from Sérine. Perhaps the debate is similar to the one in Piemonte regarding various clonal strains of nebbiolo, with many of the most important classicists in the region having a very strong preference for *Michét*, but with the possibility that fine wines can be made from several different strains of nebbiolo, if the vineyard work is careful. But, it would be awful nice if a *vigneron* of Monsieur Rostaing's stature were a defender of Petite Sérine, given how many great wines of yesteryear were crafted from this strain of syrah in Côte-Rôtie, rather than one who dismisses the importance of the old variety.

But, René Rostaing has been known to go his own way since his very earliest days as a winegrower in the region. For example, he has never joined the growers' association of Côte-Rôtie producers, despite his father-in-law being such a seminal figure in the organization for more than thirty years! Additionally, he has always been willing to look at modern winemaking techniques with an open mind and has embraced some of them in his cellar regimen, but always with an eye towards improving the quality of his classically-styled wines, rather than overtly changing the character of his Côte-Rôties to add more early plumpness and garner higher scores in certain circles. He is never hesitant to speak disparagingly of the riper, higher octane and overtly new oaky wines that define the modern school in Côte-Rôtie and have become so prevalent in recent times. Regarding his willingness to embrace new technological breakthroughs, since the mid-1980s, he has used roto-fermenters for all of his red wines (though he uses them in his own rather unique style), rather than using the open top fermenters and doing regular punch-downs, as is more typical amongst the top traditionalists of Côte-Rôtie. But, he uses his roto-fermenters far differently than they are used to make "modern" Piemontese wines, as they are used to keep the must in contact with the cap during his two week fermentations, but without introducing oxygen into the equation, which he feels is often the effect when using traditional fermentation vats and punching down or pumping over the cap. The roto-fermenters in the Rostaing cellars are turned very, very slowly (two times per day at the start of the fermentation, with three revolutions for each turn) and René feels this allows him to better

control of extraction during the early period of vatting. This is quite different than how they are routinely used with the modernists in Barolo.

In any event, he has been using these since the 1985 or 1986 vintage, so this is hardly a new technique for Monsieur Rostaing. As I noted at the outset, I had missed tasting his wines for a handful of vintages after the 1991s, and was surprised to find the wines a bit more new oaky to my palate when I caught up with his new releases in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, in the two verticals that I attended that form the tasting basis for this article, I did not find any of the wines (even from those vintages) to appear to be particularly oaky at all, and it is quite clear that the wines I tasted at those times have nicely subsumed their percentage of new wood with bottle age and it has become simply a very, very discreet supporting note in the aromatic and flavor panoplies of these wines as they have matured. That said, the oak regimen at Domaine Rostaing has also evolved a bit over the years, as René over the last decade has begun to utilize more and more *demi-muids* (550 liter capacity) and less *barriques* (225 liter capacity) for his Côte-Rôtie bottlings. There has been a bit of new wood for the wines here for decades (not that it shows much, if at all, after twenty years of bottle age!), but to my palate, the most recent vintages show an even more discreet youthful touch with the wood than was the case fifteen years ago, and this is reflective of a couple of changed dynamics in the Rostaing cellars. First of all, the move from *barriques* to *demi-muids* has accelerated in the last decade, and today, there are far more *demi-muids* used than smaller barrels. Secondly, Monsieur Rostaing has also made the transition over the last dozen years to using Burgundy barrels for his *barriques*, rather than the Bordeaux barrels he used previously, which may also account for a bit more gentle framing of oak in the resulting wines. The percentage of new wood used each year has also been falling a bit since the late 1990s, as in those days, the wines would be raised in twenty-five to thirty percent new wood, and today, with his six year barrel rotation the new wood percentage is now more like fifteen to eighteen percent (and seems like even less with the addition of a so many more *demi-muids* in the cellars here).

Other than the use of roto-fermenters and a bit of new wood, most other cellar practices at Domaine Rostaing are quite traditional, with a retention of a sizable percentage of the stems, gentle fermentations, with temperatures kept fairly cool and tend to last two weeks, followed by a couple more weeks of maceration time prior to racking off the gross lees. Only indigenous yeasts are used for the fermentations, as Monsieur Rostaing likes to say that “using commercial yeasts is a crime against the *terroir*.” The young wines stay in the roto-fermenters for this entire first month, with the rotations being reduced by Monsieur Rostaing as the fermentations start to slow down in the latter half of the first two weeks, and then he only turns the wines once every two or three days during the maceration period, seeking simply to control the extraction in a gentle manner during this early stage of the *elevage*. As he likes to say, “I vinify with an old, traditional mindset and spirit, but with modern materials.” He will typically de-stem a bit more for his regular bottling of Côte-Rôtie (these days it is thirty to forty percent de-stemmed) than for his two single vineyard bottlings of La Landonne and Côte Blonde (which in most vintages will retain around ninety percent of the stems), but of course, this depends upon the quality of the stems in any given vintage. As he notes, “I am not systematic” about destemming, “I make the wine I like.” He is also perfectly willing to not bottle one or both of the single vineyards in more difficult vintages, such as 1992, when the La Landonne went into the blended regular cuvée to give it a bit more depth. René Rostaing is also quite traditional in the vineyards when it comes to

picking times, as he is often quite vocal in his criticism of *vignerons* who harvest very late and let the alcohols soar, as well as the overripe flavors, while the acidities tumble. He prefers to pick when the wines have reached a traditional level of maturity, as he is not looking for fruit-driven, monster truck examples of Côte-Rôtie, but rather wines that accurately reflect the appellation's penchant for elegant, transparent and perfumed wines at maturity- albeit with plenty of early structure to allow them to develop slowly in the bottle. He has only filtered his wines once, in the 1988 vintage (not that it particularly hurt the wines in the long run based on how they showed at our tastings), and now will just fine them prior to bottling.

Given how classically both his La Landonne and Côte Blonde bottlings showed at our two vertical tastings, it is hard to argue that Monsieur Rostaing is becoming even more traditional in the cellars in recent times, and yet this is my distinct impression of his wines. Tasting young examples of his extraordinary bottlings from both the 2011 and 2012 vintages, one gets the sense that his wines these days are getting even more transparent and precise, with an even more classical palate impression than was the case back in the wines of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Back in those days, the Rostaing wines used to start out with plenty of stuffing and black fruity, peppery characters, and the great base of soil tones that defines his wines usually took a few years to start to come to the fore. These most recent vintages strike me as quite a bit more transparent and soil-driven right out of the blocks than the wines from the late 1980s and early 1990s (though my memory could be playing tricks), with perhaps just a bit less extraction these days and more refined and potentially ethereal personalities to be expected at full maturity for the more recent vintages. Certainly, a bit less new wood and the use of mostly *demi-muids* now for the *elevage* of the two single vineyard bottlings is contributing to this impression, and it seems quite clear to me that Monsieur Rostaing is at the top of his game today, despite the fact that his reputation in the wider world of wine was even brighter back in the day. I was truly blown away by the quality of his newest releases and heartily recommend them to folks looking to recapture the magic of that golden run of vintages in Côte-Rôtie from 1985 to 1991 and who have been a bit disheartened by some of the more modern examples of the appellation that have gained in prevalence in the last few decades.

However, one should be quick to point out that global warming has certainly had its effect on the region of the northern Rhône, as it has even more poignantly in the southern Rhône, and the last decade has seen some rather buxom and torrid vintages, such as 2003, 2005 and 2009. To my palate, it is incumbent on lovers of classically-styled Côte-Rôtie to pay less attention the hot and highly-touted vintages (no matter how purple the prose elsewhere), even from a traditionally-styled producer such as René Rostaing, and focus more on the vintages of good quality and more moderate temperatures during the growing season. Certainly both 2011 and 2012 will be stellar successes for the Rostaing Côte-Rôtie bottlings, and to my palate, both of these years have produced more complete, soil-driven and satisfying wines than the more highly-touted years of 2009 and 2010, and in the long, run, the two latter vintages seem likely to produce the finer wines. With that said, I should note that René Rostaing is a very big fan of the potential of the 2010 vintage in Côte-Rôtie, which he feels will eventually shed some of its puppy fat of thick fruit and show its inherent signature of soil and become one of the great classic vintages of the last twenty years. In contrast, he is not particularly impressed by the quality of the even hotter vintage of 2009 in this appellation. While I am sure that he is a far better judge of his own wines than I am, I will wait to see what the future holds for these most

recently-released vintages (the 2012s will be out in a few months), but fully expect to prefer the 2011 and 2012 versions to the more powerfully-built 2010s.

These days, René Rostaing makes three distinct bottlings of Côte-Rôtie, though the lineup has fluctuated a bit during the last few decades. There is a regular, blended cuvée of Côte-Rôtie that used to be called “Classique”, but has recently had its name switched to “Ampodium”. This bottling at the present time includes the production from all of his parcels other than his plots in the two vineyards of La Landonne and Côte Blonde. He did make a few single vineyard bottlings of La Viallière soon after receiving Albert Dervieux’s parcels here, but the last vintage of this bottling was produced in 1995, as Monsieur Rostaing found that the old vines here were too inconsistent in terms of yields and he never knew how much of this bottling he would be able to produce in any given vintage. Given how ardent clients can be in trying to get allocations of the single vineyard wines, one can understand that it was preferable after a few vintages to take the grapes from this great *terroir* and blend it into the Ampodium bottling, rather than try to explain why the customer who got a case of La Viallière last year was only getting a couple of bottles this year. As I noted above, the Ampodium and La Landonne bottlings are comprised of one hundred percent syrah, whereas the Côte Blonde includes the small percentage of viognier that Monsieur Rostaing has planted in this vineyard. All three cuvées are handled the same in the cellars, other than the Ampodium usually including a bit less of the stems, and the two single vineyard bottlings starting to spend most of their *elevage* in recent times in *demi-muids*. In a “normal” crop, René Rostaing will produce about twenty thousand bottles of his Ampodium cuvée each year, seven thousand of La Landonne and fifty-five hundred of the Côte Blonde. In addition, there is a small amount of old vine syrah called Les Lézardes, which is made from vineyards that lie north and just outside of the official Côte-Rôtie appellation boundaries, but which are venerable. Think of this bottling as Monsieur Rostaing’s version of Coudoulet du Beaucastel.

One of the things that was quite self-evident from our two vertical tastings of Monsieur Rostaing’s Côte-Rôties was that he has been a remarkably consistent performer over the last thirty years, and it is pretty hard to not argue that each and every vintage in which he decides to produce a single vineyard wine is sufficient cause to cellar and drink the wine in question! The absolutely superb quality of wines from so-called “lesser” years at both the La Landonne and Côte Blonde tastings was ample evidence that René Rostaing is not going to produce a single vineyard bottling if the quality of the grapes is not sufficient to make a very special bottle of Côte-Rôtie. As the notes below will attest, from 2012 all the way back to 1985, the quality of the wines was very, very high, and the differences of vintages was more evident in the style of each respective wine, rather than dramatic swings in quality levels. In fact, in this era of global warming, I would suggest that the only really disappointing wines these days from Monsieur Rostaing (in relative terms), at least from lovers of *terroir*, are the wines from the most highly-praised vintages. In my opinion, there continues to be an analytical hangover when it comes to handicapping the relative merits of vintages in the northern Rhône, with ripeness and hot growing seasons still somehow equated with potential quality, as if global warming did not exist and we were still talking about vintages in the decade of the 1970s and 1980s. Today, it is my very strong opinion that one needs to skip the vintages that are the hottest and produce the ripest wines, for even with a traditionalist like René Rostaing, there is only so much that can be done to offset heady ripeness in hot years like 2009, 2005 and 2003, and in this day and age, it is the

most hyped vintages that tend to produce the least interesting wines. Leave the 2009s and 2005s for the tourists and newbies to the region, and focus on the superlative and beautifully transparent wines that are crafted in vintages like 2011, 2006, 2004 and the like, and one can get some dramatically magical Côte-Rôtie from Monsieur Rostaing!



One of Monsieur Rostaing's parcels in the steep, terraced vineyard of Côte Blonde.

Les Lézardes and Côte-Rôtie “Ampodium”

2011 Les Lézardes Syrah- René Rostaing

The 2011 Les Lézardes from René Rostaing is really a terrific bottle of syrah, which strikes me a bit as a theoretical blend of Côte-Rôtie and Saint Joseph. The wine is deep, pure, and at twelve percent alcohol, bright and vibrant on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a fine and youthful blend of black raspberries, grilled meat, dark soil tones, pepper and a bit of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, complex and quite full-bodied, with a great core of fruit, superb focus and balance, a fair bit of ripe tannin and excellent length and grip on the very long and still quite primary finish. Just because this lovely wine does not carry the Côte-Rôtie appellation on the label, do not think that this is an easy-going wine made for early consumption, as this is deep, structured and serious. It has to be one of the great bargains in northern Rhône syrah in the entire world and is very much worthy of adding to the cellar, if one can cross paths with the wine, as only six hundred cases are produced. 2020-2045+. **90+.**

2011 Côte-Rôtie “Ampodium”- René Rostaing

The 2011 Ampodium bottling from René Rostaing is an absolute classic bottle of Côte-Rôtie in the making and fully underscores just how good this vintage is going to be in the region from the handful of traditionalists that still exist. The bouquet is deep, pure and still very primary, but oh so promising, as it wafts from the glass in a classic mélange of black raspberries, cassis, grilled venison, pepper, a beautiful base of soil tones (that seems very Côte de Brune in origin to me, which makes sense, given that most of the vineyard parcels that Monsieur Rostaing uses in this blend are from the northern half of the appellation), a touch of raw cocoa, just a whiff of cedar, gentle notes of fresh herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is young, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a great core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins, good acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very, very long and quite soil-driven finish. This is every bit as promising as the single vineyards in 2011 and smells and tastes very much like a young vintage of Gentaz, it is a must purchase for lovers of old school Côte-Rôtie! 2022-2060. **93+.**

La Landonne

2012 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- René Rostaing

The 2012 La Landonne from René Rostaing was showing great promise, even though this was a barrel sample that had been sent over to New York several weeks before the tasting. 2012 is not a highly acclaimed vintage in Côte-Rôtie, but following the axiom that the most *terroir*-specific vintages are going to be the less lauded years, this wine is already singing with soil tones. It was a short crop, as Monsieur Rostaing production was off by a third of a “normal vintage.” The 2012 La Landonne offers up a pure and youthfully complex nose of black raspberries, cassis, superb soil tones, a bit of venison and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, fairly full-bodied and showing lovely potential for both complexity and transparency, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, cool and classic finish. All this beauty needs is some bottle age! 2020-2050+. **93.**

2011 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- René Rostaing

At our tasting, I had a strong preference for the 2011 La Landonne to the wines from the two more highly-touted vintages of 2010 and 2009. Monsieur Rostaing terms 2011 a “vintage of *terroir*” and this is already self-evident in this excellent young Côte-Rôtie, as the wine offers up a classic and already quite complex bouquet of black raspberries, dark berries, roasted game, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a nice touch of youthful medicinal syrah overtones, espresso and an exotic topnote that one guest nailed as “pickle juice.” On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and riper than the 2012, but not excessively so, with a rock solid core of fruit, outstanding focus and grip, a fine signature of soil and a long, beautifully balanced finish. This is going to be a terrific wine. 2021-2055. **94.**

2010 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- René Rostaing

2010 is Monsieur Rostaing’s favorite recent vintage, and it is possible that I am underrating this wine a bit, but to my palate, there is a coarseness here and a slightly heavy-handed personality that is far less interesting (at least for now) than the lovely 2011. The nose is my favorite part of the 2010 La Landonne, as it delivers a deep and primary blend of cassis, some inkiness, grilled meats, dark soil tones, a bit of tariness and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite shut down today, with great mid-palate depth, firm, substantial, slightly grainy tannins and very good length and grip on the rather muscle-bound finish. This wine may well be deserving of a higher rating a decade down the road, but today, I

would be happier to have the 2011 or 2012 in my cellar than this brooding 2010 version of La Landonne. 2024-2050+. **90+**.

2009 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- René Rostaing

The 2009 vintage was even warmer and riper than the 2010, and I expected to like this wine decidedly less than its younger counterpart, but I was reasonably well-disposed to this more fruit-driven example of La Landonne, as the wine is at least not overtly overripe or alcoholic. The sun-baked bouquet is a mix of cassis, dark berries, pepper, hung game, damp soil tones and black olives. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, gamy and chocolaty, with a plump core, low acids and pretty good length and grip on the ripely tannic finish. This has the glossiness to its structure of a very ripe year, and I suspect that this wine will be ready to start drinking in only another three or four years. It is not a great La Landonne from Monsieur Rostaing, but, given the style of the vintage, I was expecting worse! 2017-2035. **88+**.

2006 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- René Rostaing

The 2006 northern Rhône vintage initially not as highly-touted as the riper 2005, but in retrospect, it is quite clear that this is the far superior vintage of the pair. The 2006 La Landonne from René Rostaing offers up an absolutely classic bouquet of red and black raspberries, smoked game, black pepper, a stunning signature of soil, a touch of nutskin, coffee and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long and soil-driven finish. A beautiful wine in the making, I would give this another few years in the cellar to more fully express its secondary layers of complexity. 2016-2035+. **93**.

2005 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- René Rostaing

In the mainstream wine press, 2005 is considered a superb vintage in the northern Rhône (which translates to ripe and dulled), and this wine was either quite shut down, or “Exhibit A” of why one should skip the most hyped years here in this era of global warming. Maybe the wine was just shut down completely at age nine, but at our tasting, the 2005 La Landonne showed very ripe and very anonymous in its aromatic and flavor profile, and there is simply no way I would call this Côte-Rôtie if the wine was served blind. The buxom and quite overripe bouquet delivers notes of baked cassis, coffee grounds, hung game and muddy soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, overripe and heavy-handed, with modest tannins, very low acids and a long, heavy finish. This vintage lacks brightness and seems both baked and dulled in its expression of fruit, not to mention extremely short on *terroir*. I would drink this sooner, rather than later, as it is not particularly structured now and seems likely to get heavier and fatter as time goes by and eventually come apart at the seams. Not my cup of tea. 2014-2020+? **84**.

2004 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- René Rostaing

Monsieur Rostaing’s 2004 La Landonne is a lovely wine and another quite classically profiled example of this excellent *terroir*. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a still fairly youthful blend of black raspberries, cassis, pepper, black olives, charred wood, game and a bit of medicinal syrah overtones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and nicely concentrated at the core, with fine focus and complexity, a bit of ripe, well-integrated tannin still to resolve and very good length and grip on the finish. This very good La Landonne is probably five years away from really starting to drink with overt generosity. 2019-2035. **91**.

2001 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- René Rostaing

The 2001 Rostaing La Landonne is a lovely wine that is still a bit youthfully angular and in need of further bottle age to really start to drink well, but its promise is quite evident. The bouquet is already quite complex and classy, delivering a fine constellation of black raspberries,

gamebirds, pepper, a superb signature of soil and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and still quite chewy in personality, with a fine core, firm tannins and very good length and grip on the tangy and promising finish. I suspect the good acids here have slowed this vintage's evolution a bit, and the wine still needs at least a half dozen more years in the cellar to really start to blossom. It may well eventually end up quite similar in style to the fine 1988 La Landonne. 2021-2045. **91+**.

1999 Côte-Rôtie "La Landonne"- René Rostaing

The 1999 La Landonne from René Rostaing is excellent and is now just entering its plateau of peak maturity and beginning to drink with great style and class. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a mélange of black raspberries, grilled meats, a great base of soil, a gentle touch of nutskin, autumnal overtones and black pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with superb complexity, a pure core of fruit, moderate, melting tannins and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Great juice. 2014-2040. **94**.

1998 Côte-Rôtie "La Landonne"- René Rostaing

The 1998 La Landonne from Domaine Rostaing is even more refined than the 1999, with its slightly more high-toned personality delivering even finer perfume and aromatic complexity. The stellar nose reveals an absolute classic mix of red and black raspberries, coffee, pepper, black olives, gamebird, woodsmoke, marvelous soil tones and a bit of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very soil-driven, with outstanding focus and grip, moderate tannins and lovely balance on the long, pure and complex finish. Both the 1999 and 1998 La Landonne are textbook vintages *chez* Rostaing, but I have to give a very slight edge to the 1998 for its even more pristine aromatic constellation. 2016-2045. **94+**.

1996 Côte-Rôtie "La Landonne"- René Rostaing

The 1996 La Landonne from René Rostaing is a good effort for this difficult year, as the rainy mid-summer made ripening difficult and the wine does not have the customary soil signature of top vintages of La Landonne. The bouquet offers up a fully mature mélange of black cherries, black raspberries, venison and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and velvety on the attack, with only modest focus, but some nice plumpness to its mid-palate fruit component, melted tannins and a reasonably long finish. This is a bit easy-going structurally, but it is still quite tasty and is not bad at all for this difficult vintage. 2014-2020+. **87**.

1995 Côte-Rôtie "La Landonne"- René Rostaing

The 1995s have a very strong reputation from Monsieur Rostaing, but this bottle was either off or the wine has not aged particularly well. The nose is an odd amalgam of black cherries, a bit of pepper, weedy overtones, game and an odd topnote of toothpaste. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, dull and with the same flavor panoply as on the nose, with moderate tannins and good length and grip on the finish. A very strange showing. ???

1991 Côte-Rôtie "La Landonne"- René Rostaing

The 1991 vintage was one where I was able to buy a goodly supply of Monsieur Rostaing's wines for my own cellar and drank them with great satisfaction over the first fifteen years of their lives. Consequently, I was expecting just a bit more from this bottle of La Landonne, which was very good, but which I thought might show even more dazzling, based on how well it drank a decade ago! The bouquet is deep and quite classic in its blend of pepper, black olives, raspberries, excellent soil tones, gamebirds and new leather. On the palate the wine

is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite soil-driven in personality, with a sound core, still a touch of tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and fully mature finish. The 1991 Rostaing wines were voluptuous in the mid-palate at twelve years of age, but either this bottle was not completely pristine, or the '91 La Landonne has now moved on to a more discreet stage in its evolution. This is still a very well-balanced and complex glass of mature Côte-Rôtie, but I was hoping for just a touch more fireworks at age twenty-three. 2014-2030+. **93.**

1990 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- René Rostaing

The 1990 vintage in Côte-Rôtie was never one of my favorites, as the wines were always a bit roasted in personality to my palate and not a patch on the more refined 1991s. The 1990 La Landonne showed consistent with this profile, offering up a deep, complex, roasted and slightly bretty aromatic constellation of roasted black fruit, hung game, dark soil tones, a bit of bretty barnyard, pepper and a topnote of jasmine. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still a bit medicinal, with a rock solid core of fruit, melting tannins and fine length and grip on the focused, but ever so slightly fecal finish. I am pretty tolerate of brett, but here it is coupled with the roasted character of the vintage in Côte-Rôtie and I do not love the combination, though the wine is deep, long, complex and well-balanced in all other respects. Well-made, but my least favorite vintage in the great string from 1988 to 1991. 2014-2035. **90.**

1989 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- René Rostaing

1989 was a drought year in the northern Rhône and Côte-Rôtie in particular suffered in this torrid summer, with the vines shutting down for a protracted period of time and the ripeness level here not anywhere near as consistent as one would expect from this vintage elsewhere in the region. However, the 1989 La Landonne from Monsieur Rostaing is outstanding and must be one of the best Côte-Rôtie bottlings of the vintage, as it offers up a deep and classic bouquet of red and black raspberries, gamebirds, nutskin, an excellent base of soil, pepper and an exotic topnote of fresh mint. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite soil-driven in personality, with a fine core of fruit, still a bit of remaining tannin and outstanding focus and grip on the long, complex and classy finish. Chapeau! 2014-2035+. **94.**

1988 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- René Rostaing

The 1988 La Landonne is another outstanding effort from the domaine, delivering a pure, red fruity and complex bouquet of cherries, raspberries, black pepper, roasted game, lavender, marvelous soil tones and black olives. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully defined by its soil element, with a fine core, still a bit of backend tannin, good acids and a long, complex and utterly classic finish. This is a refined and soil-driven example of Côte-Rôtie from a great *terroir* at its absolute apogee. 2014-2035. **93.**

1985 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- René Rostaing

René Rostaing's 1985 La Landonne is another beautiful bottle of fully mature and classy Côte-Rôtie. The excellent nose wafts from the glass in a refined blend of cherries, raspberries, nutskins, saddle leather, gamebirds, woodsmoke and a lovely base of autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite refined, with a solid core, melted tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long, pure and fully mature finish. Fine juice that is still at its apogee and has plenty of life still ahead of it. 2014-2030+. **93.**



Côte Blonde

2012 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

The barrel samples of the 2012s were sent by Monsieur Rostaing two weeks before the first vertical, on September 8th, and by the time we got to the Côte Blonde vertical at the end of the month, this sample had slid a bit and was not as representative of the wine as the La Landonne had been at the start of September. This wine shares the lovely elegance and early transparency of the 2012 La Landonne, offering up scents of black raspberries, cassis, a lovely base of soil, black olives and gamebirds. However, on the palate, the wine has faded a bit, with its medium-full format a bit fleeting now, from having been around for a while. I am sure that this wine will at least be the match for the 2012 La Landonne, but it was not entirely on form on September 28th.

2011 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

At this very early date, 2011 looks likely to be a great, great vintage of utterly classic wines from Monsieur Rostaing, and the Côte Blonde '11 is a superb young wine. The stunning young nose jumps from the glass in a blend of sweet dark berries, black pepper, dark chocolate, coffee, lovely soil tones and just a whisper of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and wonderfully focused, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the already very transparent finish. A classic in the making! 2025-2065. 94.

2010 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

As I noted in the La Landonne section, René Rostaing feels that the 2010 vintage has magical potential, but at this early date, I have a slight preference for the 2011 Côte Blonde, which does not possess the same power and depth, but is cooler in the mouth and already more defined by its soil elements. The 2010 Côte Blonde is a tad cooler and nascently complex than the La Landonne from this vintage, offering up scents of cassis, black olive, coffee bean, a nice base of soil and a touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great amplitude and personality. The tannins are ripe, substantial and beautifully integrated into the wine, the focus and grip here are excellent, but the wine shows just a bit of backend heat today. It is an outstanding example of a ripe vintage of Côte Blonde, but the ripe years these days are simply not the most promising for the long term, or that is at least my impression. In any event, this is a very good, soil-driven example of a riper year. 2020-2040+. **92+.**

2009 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

The 2009 Côte Blonde, hailing from an even hotter year than 2010, is a very good bottle of syrah, but not a particularly compelling vintage of Côte Blonde, as it is really quite fruit-driven in personality. Again, I like the 2009 Côte Blonde a hair better than the La Landonne in this vintage, and the wine is quite well-made, but in the context of a vertical of this great bottling, its lack of soil tones is quite self-evident. The deep (but, straightforward) bouquet is a fruit-driven blend of black raspberries, chocolate, pepper and roasted game. On the palate is deep, full-bodied and buxom, with moderate tannins, good focus and length and a bit of backend heat poking out on the plump finish. An okay 2009, but a minor Côte Blonde. 2018-2035. **89.**

2006 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

I absolutely love the 2006 Rostaing Côte Blonde, which is just now beginning to blossom and show some secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate. The utterly classic bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex constellation of cassis, black raspberries, cocoa, beautifully refined soil tones, venison, nutskins, black pepper and very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really starting to emerge from its structural elements and drink with great style, with a lovely core, ripe tannins and simply superb length and grip on the elegant and intensely flavored finish. Far superior to the 2005, despite the latter wine hailing from an erroneously over-hyped vintage. I would give the beautiful 2006 Côte Blonde another four or five years in the cellar to really let the wine blossom fully, but if you have a box of the wine, there is no crime in drinking one at this lovely moment in its evolution. Great juice. 2018-2040+. **94.**

2005 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

The 2005 Côte Blonde from René Rostaing is a very good example of a very modest quality vintage, as the heat of the summer has generally produced high octane wines that do not express the inherent elegance of the *terroir* here and it is quite clear that commentators that ranked this vintage highly out of the blocks were sadly mistaken. The '05 Côte Blonde is a bit better than the La Landonne from this year, as it seems just a touch “cooler” in its aromatic and flavor profile, but it is emphatically not a great vintage for this great wine. The bouquet is a ripe mix of cassis, black raspberries, hung game, chocolate and new oak. The higher alcohol here has soaked up more wood tannins than in a less ripe vintage, and this diminishes the expression of *terroir* in the wine at this point in its evolution. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and showing more soil elements than the equally buxom 2009 today, but with a bit of raggedy oak tannin still in evidence on the finish and the wine bordering on hot. It is a good 2005 and an

okay Rostaing Côte Blonde, but it was simply crushed by the 2006 and 2004 versions that flanked it in this flight. 2020-2035. **88.**

2004 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

The 2004 Rostaing Côte Blonde is another absolutely stellar wine, with the vintage's slightly cooler aspects having produced a classic expression of this great *terroir*. The beautiful bouquet offers up scents of cassis, nutskin, raw cocoa, black pepper, gamebirds, incipient notes of *sous bois* and a very complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, pure and gorgeously complex, with fine-grained tannins, lovely mid-palate depth, good acids and lovely length and grip. In contrast to the 2006, which hails from a slightly riper vintage and is really delicious to drink today, the 2004 could use another three or four years in the cellar to let a bit more of its tannin melt away and the fruit to fully emerge from the core and take center stage. It is a beautiful wine that is almost ready for primetime drinking, but not quite there today. 2017-2040. **94.**

2001 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

The 2001 Côte Blonde is still on the young side, as is the La Landonne from this vintage, with a more structured, old school palate impression, but it will be an excellent wine when it fully blossoms. The bouquet is the most evolved part of this fine bottle today, offering up a lovely constellation of cassis, black olive, a touch of shoe polish, roasted venison, violets and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and more primary in its flavor profile than either the 2006 or 2004 vintages, with a rock solid core of fruit, a bit of chewy tannin, lovely acids and fine length and grip on the very soil-driven personality. It would not surprise me to see this wine evolve along the same lines as the lovely 1988 Côte Blonde. 2018-2045+. **93.**

2000 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

I really like where the better 2000 northern Rhônes are today, as they are quite wide open and drinking well, but with further evolution also still quite possible. The '00 Côte Blonde is quite a fine expression of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a mélange of cassis, cocoa, grilled game, nutskins, *sous bois* and a faint whiff of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite complex, with a plump core, melted tannins, lovely focus and a long, suave and fairly low acid finish that gives the wine very nice succulence today. It will not be particularly long-lived by the high standards of this bottling, but it is a fine drink. 2014-2035. **91.**

1999 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

The 1999 Côte Blonde from René Rostaing is a brilliant young wine and clearly one of the greatest of Monsieur Rostaing's illustrious career. The magical nose soars from the glass in a blend of cassis, black raspberry, raw cocoa, hazelnuts, black olives, woodsmoke, a very gentle base of vanillin oak and still a bit of the youthful medicinal overtones of fine syrah. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and bottomless at the core, with laser-like focus, melting tannins, lovely acids and outstanding length and grip on the very complex finish. This is certainly starting to drink beautifully, but I would be strongly inclined to leave this wine in the cellar for several more years and really let it reach its apogee, as it will last for decades and decades and continue to improve. It is pure brilliance. 2014-2050. **96+.**

1998 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

The 1998 vintage was quite hot in Côte-Rôtie, but also a drought vintage and the vines tended to struggle a bit to fully ripen the fruit (at least in comparison to the perfection of the '99 growing season), and consequently, the '98 Côte Blonde shows a bit more of a “cooler fruit” tone from its less thorough ripeness. That said, this too is a superb wine in the making, delivering a fine bouquet of black raspberries, dark berries, black olives, a very strong base of soil, black

pepper and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex, with a bit of chewy tannin still to resolve, fine focus and balance and a long, tangy and quite soil-driven finish. This will be another reference point vintage for the Rostaing Côte Blonde, but it still needs four or five more years to shed a bit more tannin. 2018-2040. **94.**

1996 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

Our bottle of 1996 Côte Blonde from Monsieur Rostaing was corked, but I just mention that underneath the TCA was a superbly chiseled middleweight with great transparency and complexity, and it quite clearly is one of the top successes of this difficult vintage and a sound bottle would be delightful for drinking over the next twelve to fifteen years. Keep an eye out for this wine, as it will be well-priced and very rewarding.

1995 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

The 1995 vintage in the northern Rhône may well be one of the last really old school vintages, and the Rostaing Côte Blonde is a very fine example of this deep and structured vintage. The outstanding, classic bouquet delivers a fine blend of black raspberries, black cherries, stony soil tones, venison, black olives and lovely spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very soil-driven in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, tangy acids and still a fair bit of chewy tannins that need a few more years in the cellar to start to fully fall away. This is an excellent vintage of Côte Blonde, and though it is approachable today with some extended aeration, it would make more sense to me to just leave this wine alone in the cellar for another four or five years and let it get fully up on to its plateau of maturity. It will be very long-lived and drink with great style over its career. 2018-2045+. **93+.**

1991 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

The 1991 Côte Blonde from René Rostaing has long been considered one of his finest wines and at age twenty-three, the wine is at its apogee of peak drinkability and simply stunning. The beautiful bouquet is still fairly youthful and will develop even more complexity with further bottle age, as it delivers a glorious blend of sweet dark berries, intense peppery notes, black olives, new leather, roasted gamebird, forest floor, nutskins and violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite peppery in personality, with a glorious signature of soil, a rock solid core of fruit, great focus and balance, modest tannins and a very, very long, pure and refined finish. This wine has such beautifully pure fruit tones that it is still a touch fruit-driven in personality at age twenty-three, and for those that love this cuvée’s glorious *terroir*, I would be inclined to continue to hold this wine in the cellar and allow the soil tones to more fully take center stage. That said, it is drinking marvelously well today and keeping one’s hands off of this wine is no easy matter! 2014-2040+. **96.**

1990 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

As was the case at the La Landonne vertical held twenty days before the Côte Blonde tasting, the 1990 here showed beautifully and is ample evidence that Monsieur Rostaing had outstanding success in this drought vintage in Côte-Rôtie. The wine is fully mature and drinking at its peak, offering up a stunning nose of dark berries, raw cocoa, nutskin, roasted venison, *sous bois*, stony soil tones and a lovely topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely *à point*, with a lovely core of fruit, still just a bit of backend tannin and outstanding length and grip on the classic finish. The structure here in the 1990 Côte Blonde is not as refined as in the 1991 version, but this is another ringing success for René Rostaing. 2014-2035. **94.**

1989 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

Structurally, there are certainly some similarities between the 1989 and the 1998 Côte Blonde from Monsieur Rostaing, as both vintages were hot and dry and the vines seemed to have shut down for a bit of time during the growing season, so that the physiological ripeness of the fruit was not quite ideal and the tannins will always be just a touch chewy as a result. However, both vintages are also excellent *chez* Rostaing and the Côte Blonde is a lovely wine, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of cassis, lavender, venison, black pepper, a touch of eucalyptus, stony soil tones and a bit of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and also *à point*, with lovely complexity and focus, a touch of chewy tannin and a long, balanced and utterly satisfying finish. Lovely wine. 2014-2035. **93.**

1988 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

I love the point of evolution that the 1988 Côte Blonde has now reached, as the wine is utterly transparent and beautifully perfumed, with lovely resolution on the palate, despite still having a bit of old school, chewy tannins hanging on in the finish. The gorgeous bouquet is a mélange of red and black raspberries, raw cocoa, nutskins, grilled venison, pepper, ethereal spice tones and a magical base of complex soil nuances. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, still a bit of tannin and outstanding length and grip on the very soil-driven, complete and classic finish. A beautiful wine that will never have the silky elegance of the 1991, but is simply another facet of the full expression of this great *terroir*. 2014-2035. **93+.**

1985 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- René Rostaing

The 1985 Côte Blonde from René Rostaing is a bit younger than its counterpart from La Landonne in this vintage and the wine is simply stunning on both the nose and palate. The great bouquet soars from the glass in an *à point* constellation of raspberries, dark berries, pepper, nutskin, intense spice tones, forest floor and roasted game. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and a tad more vibrant than the '85 La Landonne, with a superb core of fruit, great soil signature and a very, very long, modestly tannic and utterly superb finish. The tannins here are not quite as sophisticated as one finds in more recent vintages from Monsieur Rostaing, but they are beautifully embedded in the base of the wine and as the '85 Côte Blonde closes in on its thirtieth birthday, the wine is at its zenith and drinking with great breed and complexity. It will last for many, many more years. 2014-2035+. **95.**

PHILIPPONNAT'S BRILLIANT MONOPOLE THE CLOS DES GOISSES



I made my first visit to the lovely offices and cellars of Champagne Philipponnat in the village of Mareuil-sur-Aÿ only this past March, but have greatly admired the quality of their wines for many years, so when Mannie Berk of the Rare Wine Company asked if I would like to participate in a vertical tasting of their great monopole of Clos des Goisses this October, I leapt at the chance. The irony was that I had already had a hand in putting together a comparative tasting of Clos des Goisses, Comtes de Champagne and Billecart Salmon's "Cuvée Nicolas François" for a bit later in the month, with the well-known New York collector, Chet Kern, so with the combination of the two tastings, I found myself having savored more vintages of the brilliant Clos des Goisses over the course of four days than I had in my entire previous tasting career! I tell you, it was one extraordinary few days of bubbly! Clos des Goisses is one of the greatest single vineyard wines produced in all of Champagne, and it has been part of the vineyard patrimony of Philipponnat since very early on in the *maison's* existence. The house was founded in 1910 by Pierre Philipponnat and in 1935, the Philipponnat family had the good sense to buy the lion's share of the vineyard of Clos des Goisses, which lies only a very, very short walk down the street from where their cellars are now located on the main road out of the center of town in Mareuil-sur-Aÿ.

While the house of Philipponnat only dates back to 1910, which is pretty youthful by the standards of the region, the Philipponnat family goes far further back in the annals of Champagne production in the region, as they can trace their origins as *vignerons* in Champagne all the way back to 1522! I have often wondered if the family's origins as *vignerons* led them to purchase the Clos des Goisses when opportunity allowed in 1935, and then inspired them to bottle this beautiful single vineyard wine on its own from that very first vintage. For, up until quite recently, truly great Champagne was considered only possible from a blending of various grapes and *terroirs*, with the winemaking philosophy in the region for centuries being that to craft the greatest Champagne, one must necessarily cast the net widely amongst a variety of different vineyard sources, as the resulting wine would always be greater than the sum of its parts. Today, in large part thanks to the brilliant legacy of wines such as Clos des Goisses and Krug's Clos du Mesnil, it is far less revolutionary to suggest that a single vineyard Champagne can be the equal of a masterful blend of the finest *terroirs*, but back in the 1940s, when the first bottling of Clos des Goisses was released from the 1935 vintage, this was indeed a fairly revolutionary move! In any case, the Philipponnat family, once they had purchased their prized Clos des Goisses, wasted no time in producing a wine solely from their beautiful monopole vineyard, and it has been produced in most good and all great vintages since 1935.

Philipponnat's Clos des Goisses is clearly one of the greatest cuvées of Champagne produced in the region, but I have found that the entire range at this small house has been exemplary over the least eight to ten years, and there is not a wine produced at the *maison* that is a weak link in their lineup. The man behind the march upwards in quality of all of the various bottlings at Champagne Philipponnat is Charles Philipponnat, who took over the direction of the *maison* back in 1999 (after an extended period of time as part of the management team at Moët et Chandon), and has helped to add precision, depth and greater complexity to each and every bottling made by the house since his arrival. Charles has ushered in quite a few changes in the cellars at Champagne Philipponnat, including starting to use some older, Burgundy barrels for the *elevage* of some of the *vins clairs*, and most importantly, extending the amount of time that all of the bottlings spend on their fine lees prior to disgorgement and release into the market, so that today, even the Philipponnat non-vintage Brut bottlings will spend fully three years on the lees prior to *dégorgement*. As he likes to recall, "when I arrived at the house in 1999, it was already after the harvest and the wines had been made, but I immediately purchased some temperature controlled tanks for the cellars for the following year, so that we could far more effectively manage the fermentations of the *vins clairs*." Twenty-five years ago, the reputation of the house was essentially that they produced one great wine in Clos des Goisses, and the remainder of the range was in the "good, but not great" class, but this has certainly changed in the twenty-first century, and today, Philipponnat is making wines of exemplary quality and impressive character from their non-vintage Brut bottlings all the way up to their various vintage-dated wines. And, of course, the quality of the Clos des Goisses cuvée, which has always been outstanding, has not missed a beat under Charles Philipponnat's watch.

The Clos des Goisses was purchased by Champagne Philipponnat in 1935 from a small house owned by cousins of the family, named Bouchet, who had owned the vineyard for thirty or forty years prior to its purchase by the Philipponnat family. Keep in mind that 1935 was the absolute nadir of the wine business in France in the twentieth century, as the world wide depression had arrived later in France than elsewhere in Europe, so its teeth were only really

being felt across the country as the mid-1930s arrived. The Bouchet family, like many smaller producers in the region in the 1930s, simply could no longer make a go of it in the adversely changed economic situation of 1930s' France and they were forced to close their doors and sell the vineyard. When the house purchased Clos des Goisses in 1935, they only obtained the filet section of the vineyard that was then owned by the Bouchets, which amounted to 2.2 hectares, with not all of this surface area even planted to vines. Charles Philipponnat recounts that probably half of the surface area of the vineyard was fallow at the time of the purchase. Today, Clos des Goisses comprises five and a half hectares, as the Philipponnat house continued to purchase other tracts of the vineyard over the ensuing years (most of these were also not planted to vines in the 1930s and 1940s, with many having never been replanted after phylloxera), until they owned the entirety of this magnificent vineyard. The Bouchet family had merchandised their production from the Clos des Goisses as a single vineyard wine as well during their days, selling the wine as "Vin des Goisses", but as the wine market in France began to slow in the '20s and '30s, the Bouchets blended their production from the Clos des Goisses into their blended bubbly, so that when the house of Philipponnat purchased Clos des Goisses in 1935 and produced their first vintage that autumn, it had been at least a decade since a bottle bearing the name of the vineyard had been commercialized.

Back when the first vintage of Clos des Goisses was produced in 1935, the Philipponnat family had their cellars overseen by one of the great winemakers of his generation, Louis Boland, who joined the house in 1913 and spent fully fifty harvests at the property prior to his retirement in 1962. Monsieur Boland was one of the seminal figures in the world of wine in the first half of the twentieth century in Champagne, as in addition to being the *Chef de Cave* at Philipponnat, he was also the pharmacist in the town of Mareuil and was the very first person in all of France to set up an oenological station in a wine producing region, to serve as a lab for analysis of young wines. Monsieur Boland brought a scientific rigor to his position that was quite new at the time and helped usher in the modern era of winemaking in Champagne, and through his efforts much of the guesswork of the past was removed or demystified. In addition to his pharmacological practices, Monsieur Boland was a very, very talented winemaker and one imagines that much of the refined and gloriously mineral style of the Clos des Goisses that we know today was shaped by the palate and skilled hands of Monsieur Boland in the very early days of this vineyard bottling. Louis Boland was instrumental in urging the Philipponnat family to purchase Clos des Goisses when it became available for sale, and his great talent in the cellar can still be sensed behind the great old vintages of Clos des Goisses that continue to cruise along and offer profound and magical drinking in the glass.

Louis Boland and the Philipponnat family are to be commended for recognizing right from the start that the unique and ideal exposition of the Clos des Goisses vineyard, which was known as Les Goisses at this time, allowed for the grapes to mature superbly well in both great and more difficult vintages, so that right from the very first vintage in 1935, the house took the decision that Clos des Goisses would be made in virtually every vintage, as this magical *terroir* has the ability to transcend the vagaries of less favored growing seasons and still produce a great wine. During the fifty years that Monsieur Boland worked at Philipponnat, Clos des Goisses was produced in all but two vintages, with only the 1944 and 1954 vintages missed during Monsieur Boland's tenure. One can well understand that the 1944 vintage would have been too difficult to produce, with the battles of World War II raging all around the vineyards of Champagne at this

time, and 1954 was not a particularly good vintage in the region, but it is pretty impressive that from 1935 until 1962, a Clos des Goisses was produced in every other vintage and is a very strong testimony to just how special is this *terroir*. After Monsieur Boland's fiftieth harvest and retirement in 1962, the management team in the cellars and of the house took a different tact with Clos des Goisses, and the great track record for producing this bottling in virtually every vintage was modified, so that between 1963 and 1988, eight vintages were skipped over for Clos des Goisses. Given the historical legacy of outstanding wines from this vineyard, even in lesser years, it was probably an error on the part of the management team at Philipponnat at this time to not produce a Clos des Goisses every year, but from 1988 forwards, the house has returned to its original premise that in virtually every year, the vineyard has something special to say, and a Clos des Goisses has been produced in every vintage since that time. As Charles Philipponnat observes, "we fully realize that some vintages are more equal than others, but just as the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti produces La Tâche in each year- understanding that the *terroir* always produces an interesting wine, no matter the vintage- we do the same at Clos des Goisses and over the years we have often found that the so-called lesser years can produce some of the most beautiful wines with bottle age."

Clos des Goisses is indeed a brilliantly-situated vineyard, overlooking the Marne River (which lies just across the small roadway that runs out of town at the base of the vineyard), with the heart of the vineyard a very steep slope facing directly south across the river. The main section of the Clos des Goisses is a beautiful, crescent-shaped ridge, with a thirty to forty-five degree slope and southerly orientation. The soils here are a thin layer of loam over a profound foundation of limestone, and the vineyard is planted to approximately sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay today, though this is in the process of being changed, as the typical *cépages* of the cuvée is two-thirds pinot noir and one-third chardonnay. Charles Philipponnat notes that "the additional chardonnay was planted at a time when it was at a moment when the grape was quite fashionable, but there are a few tracts where the soils are probably better-suited to pinot noir, and we are now undertaking a replanting of these section to return them to pinot noir, and when this is finished, the vineyard will once again be two-thirds pinot noir and mirror the *cépages* of the wine." While the majority of Clos des Goisses is comprised of this filet section of steep, south-facing hillside which looks like an inverted amphitheater, there are also other sections of the vineyard that are a bit flatter at the top of the slope, and not all are oriented directly due south either. While I imagine that this was considered less than optimal thirty or forty years ago, when no doubt, the production from these slightly flatter sections up on the plateau above the amphitheater seldom found their way into the vineyard bottling, today, with the advent of global warming, it is probably a very good thing to have these sections of the Clos that do not ripen with quite the same exuberance as the heart of the slope. It seems to me, in warmer vintages such as 2003, these flatter and slightly cooler top sections of the vineyard, without a due south exposition, can serve to give the Clos des Goisses bottling more cut and mineral spine than the section that is so beautifully-situated, so that these upper reaches of the vineyard are now of more importance in contemporary times than was the case in the past.

I am quite indebted to Tom Stevenson's terrific piece on Clos des Goisses that he wrote back in 2007 for augmenting my understanding of this vineyard, and his observations have coupled with Charles Philipponnat's generosity in fielding my many questions to really provide a lovely background on this great vineyard. Tom's piece includes an aerial photo of the vineyard,

where he has overwritten where the pinot noir and chardonnay parcels were planted in Les Goisses back in 2007, and it is a fascinating photo to look at to get some sense of where each grape variety finds its finest expression in the vineyard. From the air, one sees the great gentle crescent of Clos des Goisses towering over the Marne River (and following the line of the river), with the westerly two-thirds of the vineyard, beginning up above the cellars and *cuvée* of the house at the end of the town of Mareuil, primarily planted to pinot noir, with only the top section of central portion of this section of the slope planted to chardonnay. On the more easterly third of the vineyard, further away from the town of Mareuil, there is a large block of chardonnay that runs from the foot to the top of the hill, fully occupying the two parcels known as “l’Écluse” and “Croix des Goisses” and then the most easterly section of the vineyard and all of the flatter sections with varying expositions on the plateau above the slope proper planted again to pinot noir. When I walked the vineyard at the end of March of this year with Antoine de Boysson, Philipponnat’s Marketing Director, I was surprised to see that the vineyard is subdivided into several different *lieux à dits*. Tom Stevenson’s article cites eleven different *lieux à dits* in the Clos des Goisses, but Charles Philipponnat told me that there were only four official *lieux à dits* in the vineyard, though the house identifies fourteen distinct parcels here and vinifies each one separately. The photo at the start of this article shows the stone placard of one of these, “Le Chalet”, which at the very base of the hillside in the central section of the vineyard and is planted entirely to pinot noir.

As alluded to above, Clos des Goisses is typically a blend of two-thirds pinot noir and one-third chardonnay, with the style of each particular vintage playing some role in the ultimate *cépages* of the wine, but only a minor role. Given the superb microclimate of the vineyard, there is an amazing consistency here from year to year, so that the most a bottling of Clos des Goisses will vary is up to seventy percent pinot noir (in years where the grape excels to such a degree that it is appreciable in this great *terroir*), and there have only been a few exceptions where the inverse is true and chardonnay has played a dominant role in the blend of Clos des Goisses. Amongst the rare vintages where chardonnay plays a greater role in the blend include the 1996 vintage, which is fifty-fifty chardonnay and pinot noir, and the 1964 vintage, which is also very close to half chardonnay. Tom Stevenson, in his 2007 article on the vineyard, opines that the vintages in the 1950s and 1960s probably included more chardonnay than one-third, but there are no extant records at the *maison* to confirm or deny this assumption, and as Stevenson himself goes on to note, “it is difficult to estimate on tasting alone” because all of these wines were already mature when I first tasted them, and “chardonnay increasingly dominates any Champagne with time.” At our tasting, Charles Philipponnat felt that the 1964 was probably close to half chardonnay, like the 1996, but he was not sure of the *cépages* of other older vintages like the 1952. The cellar team at Philipponnat, now led by *Chef de Cave* Thierry Garnier, vinifies each distinct parcel of Clos des Goisses separately into a *vin clair*, and then the blending trials begin for what will constitute the new vintage’s Clos des Goisses in the late winter and early spring of the year following the harvest. Today, the *vins clairs* are fermented in a combination of , large old wood *foudres* and smaller Burgundy barrels, which range from three to ten years of age, with about a third of the *vins clairs* now fermented in barriques. Prior to the 2000 vintage of Clos des Goisses, which was Charles Philipponnat’s first where he was in full control, all of the *vins clairs* for this *cuvée* were fermented in *foudre*, though there are records that indicate that back in the very earliest days of this bottling, some of the *vins clairs* were fermented in barriques as well. The wines do not undergo malolactic fermentation (with rare

exceptions), and virtually every year is given a very minimal *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter, which effectively makes Clos des Goisses and Extra Brut bottling, though it is always designated as a Brut on the label.



Charles Philipponnat, “rocking the baby” of an empty magnum of the magical 1952 Clos des Goisses.

However, the team at Philipponnat has always understood that the unique microclimate of Clos des Goisses is very favored for ripeness, and the crafting of the wine has always taken this into account, so that the emphasis at the house has always been to produce as refined and racy an expression of this great *terroir* as the vintage conditions will allow. The vineyard, because of its perfect southerly exposition, routinely will ripen its fruit year in and year out more than a full degree higher in potential alcohol than the standard in Champagne. Of course, this is still one of the most northerly of wine-producing regions, so we are not talking fifteen percent

potential alcohol, but rather an historic average in Les Goisses of just over eleven percent, whereas the standard in Champagne is a bit under ten percent. With this in mind, Clos des Goisses has always been a wine that did not undergo malolactic fermentation at the behest of the cellar team at Philipponnat, though as already noted, occasionally, a vintage will have a mind of its own and does undergo malolactic fermentation in the initial period of aging on the lees in the bottle prior to the addition the unfermented grape juice for the secondary fermentation to put the sparkle in the wine. With its traditionally quite low *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter, one would expect that Clos des Goisses would be quite bone dry in profile, but I have never found this to be the case. In fact, due to the superb ripeness that the grapes in this most favored location routinely achieve, once Clos des Goisses is starting to mature and blossom in the bottle, there can be an almost musky quality on the nose from the riper fruit and there is no sense that the wine is any drier than a standard Brut bottling that might have more than double the amount of residual sweetness from its *dosage*. This is one of the magical elements of this great *terroir*, as even in the so-called lesser vintages, there are virtually no examples of Clos des Goisses that would be considered “fruit deficient”!

As our Rare Wine Company tasting so dramatically demonstrated, Clos des Goisses is an extreme long distance runner, with its potential longevity every bit as dramatic as the longest-lived wines in the region, such as those fashioned at Champagne Krug. Several of our older vintages at this event had been fairly recently disgorged off of their fine lees, as Charles Philipponnat took the decision in 2008 to disgorge almost all of the very oldest vintages that were still in the cellar’s library collection, which is not vast. As he observed, “it was a very difficult decision to take, as once the *dégorgement* is done, then the wine has a more limited shelf life and its life span is pretty much determined from that point forward.” But, as he continued, “the original corks on the old vintages in the cellars here were deteriorating to the point where something had to be done, and it was far better to disgorge everything of a certain age, rather than start to lose bottles as the corks failed.” When old bottles of Champagne rest in the cellars where they were produced on their fine lees, with their original carbon dioxide gas keeping them relatively young and vibrant, time moves far slower for the wines and there is no doubt that they age at a more relaxed pace in this condition. Once they are disgorged, they return again to the temporal world as we know it, and they begin to age as do other wines, so that effectively, once they are disgorged, the clock starts slowly ticking, even for Clos des Goisses. However, there are not vast stocks of old vintages in the cellars at Philipponnat today, as in the past, when the house was still wholly family-owned, there was not the same premium put on maintaining library stocks of Clos des Goisses as there is today. In the interim, the house was purchased first by Champagne Gosset in 1980, and then in 1987 the cordial company of Marie Brizard, who eventually sold Philipponnat to the group of Lanson-BCC in 1997. One of the first things that Lanson-BCC did when acquiring the house was to hire Charles Philipponnat away from Moët to lead the house that bears his family’s name and the renaissance at Champagne Philipponnat was under way. And since Charles arrived at the helm at Philipponnat, he has undertaken a far more vigorous retention of each vintage of Clos des Goisses in the cellars, so that future generations at Champagne Philipponnat will have a proper library of aged Clos des Goisses to savor.

Though for many decades, Clos des Goisses has been known by this name, the vineyard is not a proper clos in the same sense as Clos Vougeot or Clos du Mesnil, as there is not an

encircling wall around the great hillside vineyard. In fact, prior to the Philipponnat family's purchase of the first section of the vineyard in 1935, the Bouchet family sold the wine labeled as "Vin de Goisses" or simply "Les Goisses", and the first twenty-one vintages were sold under one of these monikers by the Champagne Philipponnat as well. It was not until the 1957 vintage that Clos des Goisses was dubbed and appeared on a label for the wine, as, according to Tom Stevenson, Raymond Baudoin, the famed founder of *La Revue du Vin de France* suggested the name to the house in that year. Ever since, the world has known the wine as Clos des Goisses. I am not sure what inspired Monsieur Baudoin to suggest the name change, but it seems fitting for this majestic hillside of vines. I did not ask Charles Philipponnat why the vineyard has always been planted solely to pinot noir and chardonnay, with no pinot meunier, but I imagine that the reason lies in the perception of the relative aging capacities of the three grapes. In the eyes of the *Champenois*, pinot meunier, while often bringing a fine element of additional complexity to any blend in which it is present, is far shorter-lived than either chardonnay and pinot noir. I am not sure of the accuracy of this accepted wisdom, but it is certainly a perception that has been widely accepted for many generations of winemakers in Champagne, and given Clos des Goisses great penchant of long, long aging, I am sure that it has been traditionally a chardonnay and pinot noir-based wine for this reason.

As the notes below will attest, Clos des Goisses is certainly one of the region's longest-lived wines, and based on how fabulous the wines from the vintages of the 1970s and further back are drinking today, it would seem that there are only a very, very small handful of wines in Champagne that can match the potential longevity of Clos des Goisses. Part of this is of course thanks to the efforts of the cellar teams that have fashioned the wines over the years since 1935, and probably dates back to the insights of Louis Boland and Pierre Philipponnat all the way back when the vineyard was first purchased by the *maison*. The longevity of the wine is certainly augmented by the decision to not allow the *vins clairs* to go through malolactic fermentation, and this is certainly increased by the stunning base of pure limestone that lies just below the loamy topsoil of this majestic hillside. This base of limestone is quite unique in Mareuil, as most of the other vineyards in the village include a large percentage of clay interspersed with their limestone, but this is not the case with Clos des Goisses. The topsoil is fairly deep on the hillside, due to the efforts of past generations to add manure and compost to the steep slope, trying to offset the natural erosion of the incline. Below this loam is a very profound base of pure limestone, with a thirty percent active limestone rating that is higher than the village average of twenty-five percent, and as Tom Stevenson points out, far more similar to the nearby village of Aÿ, which has the highest percentage of active limestone of any pinot noir-centric village in the Champagne region. The result at Clos des Goisses is a wine of profound minerality, which acts as a sturdy spine for long-term aging and which, coupled to the spine of malic acidity that defines most vintages of the wine, creates quite a youthful structural girdle for new vintages of the wine.

Charles Philipponnat also pointed out that Clos des Goisses is often quite reductive when it is first released, which is all to the good for a wine destined for a very long life in bottle, and it will often take close to a half dozen years after the new vintage is released for the wine to start to emerge from this youthful period and show some generosity. The house of Philipponnat will typically allow a new vintage of Clos des Goisses to rest on its fine lees from eight to ten years, prior to disgorgement and preparation for the market, and then the wine spends another nine months in the cellars after its *dégorgement* to recover prior to it being shipped to the market.

Unlike vintage-dated wines from Krug, where the house has sometimes inverted the release of one vintage over another, based on the general structure of the wine, there has only been on instance where a younger vintage of Clos des Goisses was released prior to an older sibling, as the 1989 vintage was released into the market ahead of the racier 1988 Clos des Goisses. Charles Philipponnat, when reflecting upon this decision, said that “it was probably a mistake to do so, as it created perceptions of the relative merits of the two vintages, and in the future, we will always release Clos des Goisses in chronological order, as each vintage has its own personality and character and there is no real reason to offer one before another.” Once a new vintage of Clos des Goisses is released around its tenth birthday, it begins its vinous journey, and in most years, a minimum of another decade’s worth of bottle age is highly recommended, as this wine develops dramatically with bottle age. In a perfect world, I would not open a bottle of Clos des Goisses until it has reached its thirtieth birthday, as that seems to be the tipping point in its evolution where the real fireworks commence!

Young Clos des Goisses (here we mean between the ages of ten and twenty) is a fairly tight wine that is absolutely defined by its great mineral complexity, with the youthful fruit often having an overtly red fruity character. However, with sufficient bottle age, Clos des Goisses blossoms into an amazingly aromatic wine, with musky floral tones, glorious variations of pear and tropical fruit, plenty of smokiness, nutty tones redolent of almonds, macadamia nuts or walnuts (depending on the age and vintage), not to mention, all of the underlying minerality from that profound base of limestone growing exponentially in complexity with the passage of time. Despite the riper elements in the fruit that are inherent here because of the great southerly exposition of the vineyard, Clos des Goisses is never a heavy-handed or overtly broad-shouldered wine, but rather a wine of stunning intensity and classic *Champenois* elegance and breed. When one drinks a thirty or forty year-old vintage of Clos des Goisses, with all of its aromatic exotica in full bloom, it can often be surprising how refined and elegant the wine remains on the palate, with great structure and impeccable balance and absolutely no sense of heaviness that one might intuitively expect, given that the fruit here is always a bit riper than that of most other vineyards in Champagne. The vineyard is also famous for quite low yields by Champagne standards, which typically run around half of the standard in the region. In many ways, the vineyard of Clos des Goisses has naturally anticipated many of the tenets and changes that have informed the work of Anselme Selosse in Champagne, as his emphasis on lower yields, better ripeness and great *terroirs* have all been crystallized in Clos des Goisses, due primarily to its unique and magical *terroir*, since the first vintage of 1935. Perhaps, if Louis Boland were still with us, he would find a kindred spirit in Monsieur Selosse.

The vast majority of the following wines were tasted over the course of the two amazing tastings I mentioned at the start of the article, which were held here in New York in mid-October. The Rare Wine Company event, was a pure vertical of Clos des Goisses stretching from the newly released 2004 all the way back to the magnums of the 1964 and 1952, which many commentators nominate as the greatest vintage ever produced of Clos des Goisses. Four days later, I took part in the tasting organized by Chet Kern, where we tackled verticals of Clos des Goisses, Taittinger Comtes de Champagne and Billecart-Salmon “Cuvée Nicolas-François”. I have augmented the notes from these two tastings with recent notes on (the few) vintages of Clos des Goisses that I had tasted and which were not represented at one of these two great events. As I noted above, today, Clos des Goisses is intended to be produced in every vintage, and the two

tastings fully underscored that this great *terroir* is indeed capable of magic in virtually every growing season, even in less favored years like 2003 or 1980. As Charles Philipponnat opined, “in the lesser years, Clos des Goisses may be just a touch shorter and it may be a bit more defined by its smokiness from yeast autolysis, as there is less ripe fruit in those years, but the wines are always first and foremost Clos des Goisses, and this is consistent each and every year.” This perspective is more Burgundian than *Champenoise* in my experience, but as the tasting notes below will attest, this tenet is certainly borne out by experience. One will notice the amazing consistency of scores for the various vintages of Clos des Goisses, as the iterations of vintage variations simply dances across the surface of the wine, with the underlying *terroir* rolling along languidly below the surface, like a reflection of the setting sun on a profound body of water. This is one of Champagne’s greatest vineyards and wines, and as the notes below will suggest, it is also one of the region’s longest-lived wines, and to really get a sense of the ultimate grandeur of the wine produced from this magical slope, it really is best to give the wine fully twenty-five or thirty years’ worth of bottle age, as when one crosses paths with wines like the 1989, 1982 or 1975, one starts to see the full panoply of nuance that defines this wine on both the nose and palate at peak maturity, and which can often lie slightly hidden behind the structure and profound minerality of the wine when younger.

2004 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut (Disgorged November 2013)

The 2004 Clos des Goisses is one of the very few vintages here that has undergone malolactic fermentation, as the wine undertook this decision on its own, and the malo took place in bottle while the wine was resting on its lees and awaiting its *dosage* for the secondary fermentation. Given the raciness of the 2004 vintage in general, the full malo here is hardly to be noticed, and without Charles Philipponnat having told me about this, I doubt that I would have ever noticed. The wine has opened up a bit since I last tasted it at the domaine at the end of March, and this is destined to be a great vintage of Clos des Goisses in the fullness of time. The superb bouquet shows off outstanding depth and nascent complexity in its constellation of apple, tart orange, a touch of cranberry, complex, youthful minerality, plenty of smokiness and early signs of the wine’s classic nuttiness already emerging in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with outstanding focus and grip, very refined *mousse* and simply superb length on the poised and perfectly balanced finish. I did not know 2004’s telltale touch of *herbacité* here in New York that I noted in Mareuil in March, and I now think that this element was more a function of its relatively recent disgorgement (only four months previous when I first tasted it), rather than a signature in this vintage of Clos des Goisses. This will be a great wine. 2020-2070. **95+**.

2003 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut

The 2003 Clos des Goisses is a tad on the exotic side fairly early on in its evolution, but it is a very, very strong example of the vintage. As Charles Philipponnat commented, “one must remember that the heat of the summer was not the defining element of 2003, but rather the extreme frost damage in the winter and spring, which reduced yields in the vineyard to draconian levels.” The bouquet on the ’03 is excellent, wafting from the glass in a musky blend of peach, a touch of raspberry, brioche, passion fruit, stony minerality and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and long, with a fine core, classic Goisses mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the blossoming and succulent finish. This is a young vintage of Clos des Goisses that I would not hesitate to start drinking, though it still has

plenty of life ahead of it and is probably still a few years away from its apogee. In the 2003 vintage, only Krug Vintage is superior in my experience to this lovely bottle. 2017-2040. **92+**.

2002 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut

These most recent two bottles of the 2002 Clos des Goisses were both magnificent. The wine is starting to really drink with great style at age twelve, and though it remains early days in the evolution of this wine, it is really already getting irresistible. The deep, pure and wide open bouquet shows quite a bit of the exotica that defines this wine at full maturity, as it soars from the glass in a mélange of ripe pears, musky floral tones, kaleidoscopic minerality, brioche and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and magically complex, with bottomless depth at the core, laser-like focus, bright, zesty acids, pinpoint bubbles and simply stunning length and grip on the impeccably balanced and wide open finish. Intuitively, I know this is still early days for the 2002 Clos des Goisses, but for those wise enough to have a substantial cache of this wine in the cellar, it is a far cry from a crime to be opening bottles now! Sheer brilliance. 2014-2050+. **97**.



The Marne River, as seen for the top of the central section of the Clos des Goisses vineyard.

2001 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut

In the context of the two verticals I attended of Clos des Goisses, I have to say that only one vintage seemed more a reflection of its growing season than the vineyard, and that would be the 2001. This is an okay bottle of bubbly, but in the context of the consistent magic of Clos des

Goisses, it is a bit of a weak link. The 2001 Goisses is a solid, rather deep-pitched wine that lacks a bit of the vibrancy so typical from this vineyard, as it offers up a fairly complex nose of lavender, backed peaches, nutmeg, biscuits, plenty of leesy tones and a very modest signature of soil, particularly for Clos des Goisses. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit of character, with solid depth, a slight sense of murkiness, but also good length and grip on the reasonably well-balanced finish. To be fair, I had this wine flanked by the 2002 and 2000 Clos des Goisses in this flight, and perhaps I would have been a bit more positive about the wine on its own, but with the fireworks going off in the glass from those two vintages, it was hard to generate a lot of excitement for the 2001. Unless this wine rallies with further bottle age, it will be a pretty short-lived wine by the high standards of Clos des Goisses, but it still has a fair bit of life ahead of it. 2014-2025. **88.**

2000 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut

The 2000 Clos des Goisses is officially Charles Philipponnat's first vintage, as the *vins clairs* from 1999 had already been made when he arrived here in Mareuil. This is another outstanding vintage of Clos des Goisses (though you will hear that a lot in the notes that follow!), as it offers up a blossoming bouquet of peach, apple, walnuts, lovely minerality, plenty of signature smokiness and a lovely element of wheat toast. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite ripe in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, great focus and grip, elegant *mousse*, excellent acids and superb balance on the very, very long and now quite wide open finish. This was a ripe year, which has lent itself to the 2000 Clos des Goisses reaching its apogee a bit earlier, but all of the constituent components are in place here for the wine to cruise along at this superb level for decades and decades to come. Not surprisingly, this is another great wine. 2014-2040+. **95.**

1999 Philipponnat "Clos des Goisses" Brut (Disgorged April 2008)

Philipponnat's 1999 Clos des Goisses is a brilliant wine in the making, but it is still very, very young and has some SO₂ to work through before it will really be ready for primetime drinking. The superb bouquet is a youthful and vibrant blend of grapefruit, white currant, kaleidoscopic minerality, brioche, gentle smokiness and orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, utterly refined *mousse*, brisk acids, laser-like focus and stunning mineral drive on the very, very long and snappy finish. This is a great wine in the making, but I would not consider opening a bottle of the '99 Clos des Goisses for at least another four or five years. It is not that the wine is not drinkable at this early stage, but to open bottles now is to waste precious magic in the future! A great wine in the making, but exercise a bit of patience. 2016-2040. **94+.**

1998 Philipponnat "Clos des Goisses" Brut

The 1998 Clos des Goisses is a lovely example of the vintage, and though at our three *Têtes de Cuvées* vertical in October, the bottle we had was not the finest I have tried, the bottle before that one was pristine and consistent with the excellent examples of the '98 I have had in the recent past. The wine offers up a lovely and blossoming nose of apples, white peaches, fresh-baked bread, the classic minerality of Les Goisses, orange peel and a touch of caraway seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off lovely concentration at the core, with a classic signature of soil, lovely focus and balance, refined, pinpoint bubbles and excellent length and grip on the complex and classy finish. This is starting to drink very well indeed at age sixteen, but having now drunk so many older vintages of Clos des Goisses, I would be inclined to keep this wine in the cellar a few more years before starting to pop it in earnest, as it is just starting to show the first signs of the muskiness of fully mature Clos des Goisses, and it

is well worth waiting for that period to arrive before drinking the wine with wild abandon! 2019-2040. **93.**

1996 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut

The atypical 1996 Clos des Goisses, with its *cépages* of fifty percent each chardonnay and pinot noir, is a legendary vintage in the making of this iconic wine. The beautiful and very aromatically complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, tangerine, brioche, walnuts, refined, chalky minerality, smoke and just a touch of white chocolate (from the chardonnay?) in the upper register. On the palate the wine is majestic, with its full-bodied and racy format impeccably balanced. The wine is bottomless in the mid-palate, with great focus and cut, elegant *mousse* and a very, very long, complex and wide open finish. The perception amongst the *Champenois* is that many 1996s have not fulfilled their early promise (with the acids getting the ascendancy in the wines as they have aged), but this is emphatically not the case with the 1996 Clos des Goisses, which is a breathtakingly beautiful bottle of bubbly! 2014-2060+. **96+.**

1995 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut

The 1995 vintage was a very short crop in Champagne in general and even shorter in Clos des Goisses, due to spring frosts, but the year has provided the raw materials for an utterly classic rendition of this great *terroir*. The brilliant bouquet delivers a mélange of apple, white peach, nutskin, a simply kaleidoscopic expression of minerality, rye bread and plenty of upper register smokiness. Though the nose is quite open, it is also clear that none of the aromatic exotica that defines this wine at full maturity has even begun to stir in the 1995, so this wine is still years away from its apogee! On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very soil-driven in personality, with a rock solid core, outstanding acidity, very elegant *mousse* and a lovely, long and nascently complex finish. This seems likely to be one of the great, great vintages of Clos des Goisses in the fullness of time, and though it does not show any of the youthful sizzle of vintages like 1996 or 22002, I have a sneaky suspicion that the 1995 Clos des Goisses will be a legend in the fullness of time and match those two great vintages. 2020-2060+. **96.**

1992 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut (served from magnum)

It had been a couple of years since I last crossed paths with the 1992 Clos des Goisses and the wine now is fully mature and probably best drunk up in the next several years. Clos des Goisses is one of the greatest *terroirs* in all of Champagne, and in most top vintages it will age considerably longer than the 1992 appears to be doing at the present time. This is not a criticism of the 1992, as this is a delicious bottle of bubbly for current drinking, but there is just the first touch of marshmallow-type tones on the finish that suggest that this wine is moving into the latter stages of its peak maturity and will probably not improve beyond this point in time. The mature and very classy nose offers up scents of apple, grapefruit, lemon zest, great, complex and very stony minerality, bread dough and an exotic topnote of mint leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and stony, with fine acids, very elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the wide open and complex finish. A very lovely and classy glass of bubbly today, I would be strongly inclined to drink up the 1992 Clos des Goisses over the next several years, while holding on to a few of the more structured surrounding vintages for longer-term cellaring. 2011-2020. **93.**

1990 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut

I have generally found the 1990 vintage in Champagne (as elsewhere in Europe) to have aged relatively briskly and to not have really fulfilled its early promise. However, this is not true of the 1990 Clos des Goisses, which is one of the best examples of this vintage I have tasted in

quite some time. The wine today is fully mature and drinking beautifully, offering up scents of pear, apple, almond paste, blossoming musky floral tones, smoke, a touch of yellow curry and a gently savory topnote that might recall geraniums. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with a fine mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse*, very good acidity and a long, multi-dimensional finish that echoes just a touch of the savory elements to be found on the nose. A lovely, lovely wine. 2014-2030+. **93.**

1989 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut

The 1989 Clos des Goisses in regular-sized format is really drinking beautifully, wafting from the glass in a complex mélange of apple, warm bread, a stunningly complex base of minerality, a touch of almond and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and drinking very well indeed, with a rock solid core, a fine spine of minerality, very elegant *mousse* and excellent complexity and grip on the long, vibrant and impressive finish. Just a lovely vintage of Clos des Goisses for current consumption, but with decades of life still ahead of it. This bottle was drunk with great pleasure in August of this year, and it was an interesting counterpoint to the more recently disgorged magnum of the '89 that we had at our Rare Wine Company event. 2014-2035+. **94.**

1989 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut (served from magnum)

This magnum of the 1989 Clos des Goisses came directly from the *maison* for the Rare Wine Company event and was disgorged in the fall of last year, so it was in fine, fine form at the time of our tasting a year later. Out of recently-disgorged magnum, the 1989 Clos des Goisses is spectacular, soaring from the glass in a classic mélange apple, white peach, walnuts, beautiful minerality, warm bread and that classic, smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a superb core, laser-like focus, supreme balance and a very, very long and refined finish. This is still on the young side in this format, without any of the musky floral tones that will come with more bottle age, but structurally, the wine is wide open and it is really a stunning glass of bubbly today. 2014-2050. **95+.**

1983 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut

1983 is not a great vintage in Champagne, but I have had some lovely examples from this year and the Clos des Goisses seems to be one of the best wines produced in the region in '83. The wine is now absolutely *à point*, offering up a complex and vibrant nose of peach, apple, walnuts, a touch of orange peel, plenty of smokiness and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tertiary in its complexity, with a wide open and vibrant personality, superb acids, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused and beautifully detailed finish. Great juice and a very strong argument for the superiority of this *terroir* in lesser years. 2014-2035+. **94.**

1982 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut

As Charles Philipponnat pointed out, 1982 was an excellent year from the outset, but not particularly powerful in personality and destined for greatness primarily based on its purity and superior balance. At age thirty-two, the '82 Clos des Goisses has reached its apogee and is drinking splendidly, wafting from the glass in that musky mélange of pear, apple, acacia blossoms, brioche, chalky minerality and a plethora of sweet, nutty tones, with perhaps macadamia nuts in the ascendancy. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly classic in size and shape, with lovely mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse*, beautiful focus and balance, bright acids and lovely grip on the very complex and refined finish. A classic vintage of Clos des Goisses. 2014-2035+. **95.**

1980 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut

The 1980 vintage of Clos des Goisses is one of the lighter-styled years for this bottling, but it is still a lovely wine and a strong argument for producing this wine in each and every vintage. The bouquet is quite classy, offering up more dried fruit tones than most vintages from this era, with notes of desiccated apples and peaches, gentle leesy tones, a bit of orange peel, a lovely base of soil, plenty of smokiness and a nice dollop of iodine in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and tertiary in its complexity, with fine acids and still very vigorous *mousse*. The finish is long, complex and more defined by its yeast autolysis tones than most vintages of Clos des Goisses, but still a very complete and fulfilling glass of Champagne. Charles Philipponnat commented that in lighter vintages such as 1980, where the fruit is less ripe, the wine tends to be more defined by its smoky elements from the autolysis when it gets to full maturity, and this is certainly the case here. But, still a lovely drink. 2014-2030+. **91.**

1976 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut (served from magnum)

1976 is a great vintage for Clos des Goisses, and with a magnum that had been disgorged only a year ago off of its original fine lees, we were treated to this wine at its absolute zenith. The ripe and smoky nose has begun to really be defined by the aromatic exotica of great old Clos des Goisses, soaring from the glass in a magical constellation of dried apple, fresh apricot, stony minerality, a bit of iodine, musky floral tones, gentle leanness and a lovely smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with racy acids, laser-like focus, stunning complexity and a very, very long finish that closes with outstanding grip and mineral drive. A great, great Clos des Goisses. 2014-2040+. **96.**

1975 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut

Our bottles of 1975 Clos des Goisses had been disgorged back in the mid-1980s, so were a bit more advanced than our recently disgorged magnum of the 1976, but this simply meant that this brilliant wine was even more complex (being further along its evolutionary arc) than its younger sibling! The stunning nose delivers a multi-dimensional and tertiary blend of fresh apricot, passion fruit, plenty of floral musk, stony minerality, macadamia nuts and that classic topnote of smokiness that is so emblematic of mature Clos des Goisses. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and at its apogee, with stunning mid-palate concentration, great focus and bounce, elegant *mousse* and magical complexity on the very, very long and perfectly balanced finish. This wine still has decades of life ahead of it, but it is in an absolutely perfect place for drinking today! 2014-2035. **96.**

1964 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut (served from magnum)

Like the 1996, the 1964 Clos des Goisses is one of those rare vintages where the chardonnay in the blend was at least the equal of the pinot noir, and it may in fact have had a touch more chardonnay in the mix in this year. This is one of those older wines that Charles Philipponnat had to disgorge and re-cork in 2008, and I am very, very happy that he did not risk losing any of these magical magnums to failing corks! The stunning nose is deep, pure and exotically flamboyant, soaring from the glass in a blaze of desiccated apple and peach, warm bread, plenty of signature smokiness, sweet almonds, a bit of citrus zest, chalky minerality and a pungent topnote of musk. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly refined, with great mid-palate depth, seamless balance, great focus and grip, vibrant *mousse* and stunning complexity on the very, very, very long and zesty finish. Sheer brilliance! 2014-2040+. **97.**



1952 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut (served from magnum)

The 1952 Clos des Goisses has a legendary reputation, and based on this stunning magnum, it seems to me that every superlative ever addressed to this wine is completely just. This too had been disgorged in 2008, and the wine today is pure magic, offering up a brilliantly complex and *à point* nose of peach, pear, musky floral tones, brioche, nutskin, a gorgeous base of soil and an exotic touch of savory notes in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tertiary and stunningly complex, with a super core, vigorous *mousse*, laser-like focus and tons of energy on the perfectly balanced and endless finish. This wine will last at least another twenty years, and probably, twenty years from now, we will be saying that it still has another twenty years of life in it! Champagne simply does not get any better than this magnum of 1952 Clos des Goisses! 2014-2035+. **100.**

GALICIA- THE BURGUNDY OF SPAIN



In the heart of the Miño River valley in Ribeira Sacra.

The wine-producing regions of Galicia, located in the northwest corner of Spain, running up from the Portuguese border north to the Atlantic Ocean, must be one of the greatest (relatively) unknown wine regions in the world today. Its reality is far removed from today's mainstream wine world of Spain, where so many vineyards unfold in hot, semi-arid sections of the country and the wines echo their hot summers with deeply-colored libations that are all too often defined by buxom personalities and high octanes. In Galicia, though temperatures can of course be plenty warm in the summer, as this is Spain after all and we are not all that far from the tropics, this is the coolest of wine Spanish wine regions and rainfall is as plentiful here over the course of the year as anywhere on the Iberian peninsula. Annual rainfall in Galicia averages anywhere from one thousand to seventeen hundred millimeters per year, or more than three times that of Ribera del Duero, to give some idea of how much more precipitation falls on this beautiful corner of Spain than in most Spanish wine regions. Drip irrigation, which has only been allowed in Spanish wine regions since 1995 (and has played a rather questionable role in quality)

is certainly not needed in this northwest corner of the peninsula. The surrounding Atlantic Ocean plays a major role in defining the unique and excellent microclimates of Galicia, as its influence steals inland over the beautiful, pergola-trained old vines of Rías Baixas looking out at the ocean all the way inland to Bierzo and Valdeorras on the eastern end of Galicia, two hundred kilometers from the sea.

Galicia is one of the most breathtakingly beautiful and diverse wine-producing regions that I have had the pleasure to visit, and wine tourists would not be amiss in visiting here solely for the stunning variations of natural beauty that unfold as the mountains of the region climb up out of the sea, but in fact, the wines here are truly stunning and only getting better with each passing vintage, as this is a region that is just starting to come to terms with its vinous promise and its future is destined to be even finer than its lovely past. The Romans, not surprisingly, were the first to plant vines in this northwestern corner of Spain (or at least theirs are the first recorded cultivations of the vine in Galicia), but it is really the Cistercian monks that settled here in their period of cultural hegemony in Europe that organized and crafted the wine regions that today make up Galicia. The Cistercians arrived in the area in the thirteenth century, at the height of their influence, and many of the regions and vineyards were organized under their watch. Where there were Cistercian monasteries, there were also Templar Knights to protect them, and the regions that make up Galicia are littered with ancient castles and churches that show the rich cultural heritage left behind by both the Cistercians and Templars during their nearly two hundred years at the pinnacle of European power in the middle ages. In fact, as the persecution of the Templar order was far more tepid in Spain and Portugal than it was in France after Black Friday in 1307 (when the French King and the Pope successfully suppressed the order in France), it is quite likely that many French knights repaired to the remote and mountainous regions of Galicia in the fourteenth century to avoid persecution and the treasure that is today wine production in Galicia may well owe a supreme debt to these escapees more than seven hundred years ago.

Galicia is subdivided into five different D.O.s (*Denominación de Origen*, the Spanish equivalent to France's *Appellation Contrôlée*) which include, from west to east, Rías Baixas, Ribeiro, Ribera Sacra, Valdeorras and Bierzo. The most easterly of these D.O.s is Rías Baixas, which lies right on the Atlantic coast, with its beautiful terraced vineyards overlooking the ocean in many places and the vines here trained (relatively) high on pergolas, to allow for excellent air circulation during the humid growing season which helps fight mildew and other fungal diseases that are a constant threat in this moist region. The Gallegos, the inhabitants of Galicia, do not tend to be the tallest of the Spanish population, so the pergolas are not particularly high off of the ground, probably averaging about six feet or so in height, which makes them fairly easy to work, but a bit more difficult for some of us to walk beneath. In addition to helping with air circulation and minimizing the threat of mildew in the vines, the pergolas also serve a very important function in allowing the leaf canopy to be trained up above the grapes and easily managed to the needs of a particular growing season, so that sunburned grapes are never a problem in Rías Baixas. Not all of the vines are trained on pergolas in this region, as of course, this method of vine cultivation insists upon being tended and picked by hand, and I imagine that there must be corners of the D.O. where the vines are trained on wires so that they can be worked and picked by machine. The predominant grape here is Albariño, for which the region is justly famous, but there are also parcels planted to Treixadura and Loureira Blanca, and there are also scattered

plantings of red wine grapes including Caiño Tinto, Loureira Tinto and even Pinot Noir. But, that said, Albariño is rightly considered the king variety of Rías Baixas and this grape produces some of the most profound white wines to be found in all of Spain, and for that matter, anywhere in the world.

Most wine lovers today associate Albariño with a pleasant, lighter-bodied and lime-scented wine of good minerality, but hardly prestigious complexity and depth, and it is true that the vast majority of wines produced in the region today from this grape are indeed accurate reflections of this less than inspiring description. For most Albariño is made in a modern commercial style, with huge yields, industrially-inspired winemaking that includes plenty of commercial yeasts to hasten along the fermentation (and provide that classic lime scent) and very early bottling to get the wines into bottle and maximize cash flow to the utmost. Those wines, which are still probably amongst the most interesting of the industrial wine world, are not the wines that interest me in Rías Baixas, as there is a small and growing number of very serious *vignerons* in the region that are making wines that are far more serious, ageworthy and complex, and these are the wines that will come in time to define this region. Their spiritual leader for the last couple of decades has been Francisco “Paco” Dovaló López, who helped found the artisanal growers’ association, the *Asociación de Bodegas Artesanas*, in Rías Baixas back in 1989 and continues on as its head to this day, with his superb wines from his winery of Adega of Cabaleiro do Val amongst the greatest white wines produced in all of Spain. The tenets of the high quality-oriented producers of Albariño are seeking out old vines, cropping at far lower yields than has become typical of the commercial juice, fermenting solely with indigenous yeasts and aging their wines for an extended period on their fine lees, to add depth, dimension and potential for longevity to their wines. The differences these relatively small steps make in the quality of the wines of these producers is very, very dramatic, and due to their relative simplicity, one hopes that more estates will follow their lead in the near future and we will see the quantity of truly great Albariño grow exponentially in the years to come.

Most of these high quality producers labored along in complete anonymity, even in their own region, until quite recently, but there is hope that this is just about to change. As I was heading out of Rías Baixas for Ribera Sacra on my recent trip, the most important newspaper in Galicia was running a multi-page feature on the superb wines produced by this growers’ association in their Sunday paper, so that the long overdue accolades that these superb wines deserve may be starting to finally arrive. The beauty of low yield, old vine Albariño is that it ages very, very well, offering up admirable complexity on both the nose and palate and gaining in both of these as the years unfold. After only one visit to the region, I am still not certain of just how long these artisanal Albariños can age, but surely, ten to twelve years is a bare minimum, and it seems likely that fifteen or more is not outside the realm of possibility, particularly in racier vintages. The nice thing about Albariño is that it tends to reach its apogee of peak maturity at a brisker rate than other top white wine varieties, such as Chardonnay, so that eight to ten years of bottle age for Albariño will do the work of twenty years for a comparably fine white Burgundy. In an age of premature oxidation, the value of this is self-evident. While most of the small producers in the growers’ association ferment and age their wines in stainless steel tanks, there are some experiments in the region being done with barrel-fermenting this varietal and aging the wine for a period of time in older casks, and while it is not my favorite expression of Albariño, one does have to note that the results at a superb estate such as Palacio de Fefiñanes

have not been without merit. Much like using Burgundy barrels for certain cuvées of Cru Beaujolais, the use of some older wood for Albariño, if done judiciously, can still be quite successful and simply produces another expression of this lovely grape and its fine underlying *terroirs*.



Francisco "Paco" Dovalo López, the Godfather of today's great Albariños in Rías Baixas.

Rías Biexas is divided into several sub-regions, of which I only visited the coolest and one of the most important on this trip, Val do Salnés. It lies to the north and west of the central city of Rías Biexas, Pontevedra, with a large percentage of its vineyard land overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. This was the birthplace of the D.O. of Rías Biexas, as it was first petitioned for and utilized by the excellent Albariño estate of Palacio de Fefiñanes, which is based right in the center of the lovely fishing town of Cambados, and a great many of the most quality conscious producers of Albariño are to be found in Val do Salnés. Paco Dovalo and several of his artisanal compatriots are based a bit to the south of Cambados, in the village of Meaño, which seems to be home (based on my first cursory visit) to some of the very finest *terroir* in all of Rías Biexas and plenty of very old vines. In this Atlantic climate, old vines are certainly plentiful, with the vineyard training system of using pergolas often resulting in these ancient vines (many well over

one hundred years of age) looking more like twisted and gnarled tree trunks under the pergolas, with their bunches hanging down from under a leafy canopy of green. As I was very interested in the potential ageability of Albariño from the very best producers in the region, I was treated to several older bottles during the course of my two days of visits to producers in the region, and it is quite clear that first class Albariño ages very well for a minimum of ten to twelve years out from the vintage, and that the wines are actually far more interesting to drink once they have had at least four or five years of cellaring. Keep in mind that we are only talking about the most quality-oriented producers, but there are certainly enough of these to be found today in Rías Baixas to keep even the finest of well-stocked cellars full of options. The wines tend to be very different in style from one another at the top estates, which I assume is a reflection of their distinctive *terroirs*, but with only one visit under my belt, this is only an assumption at this time. Several of these top estates are now practicing extended aging on the fine lees for their finest small lots, so for instance, I had the pleasure to taste a spectacular 2010 Albariño from Paco Dovalo that was still in tank and had not yet been bottled! Each estate that is practicing holding onto a tank or two for extended aging on the lees labels these special cuvées differently, but many are labeling them as “Colleita Seleccionada”.

If I can be permitted to extend the Burgundian analogy to Galicia for a bit more time, then one can think of the best Albariño examples as similar to Chablis, as these are wines that are very much defined by their strikingly complex and varied expressions of minerality. I could be wrong, but I have a gut feeling that Albariño is inherently a bit less complex grape than Chardonnay, but these top estates are counteracting this by allowing some of their finest lots to age for an extended period of time on their fine lees, which seems to me to add both complexity to the wine and also impart greater potential for long-term aging. They are not as ample in the mid-palate as those made from Godello, nor as aromatically exotic as white wines that include Treixadura or Loureira Blanca in a blend, but to my palate, Albariño is probably the greatest white wine grape in Galicia- at least as it is crafted by the most serious producers in Rías Baixas.

Rías Baixas

The principal vintage that I was tasting on this visit to Rías Baixas was the 2013, which is not considered a very strong year in the region by the winegrowers whom I had an opportunity to visit. However, proving the old adage correct that one should follow producers and not vintages, the lineup of 2013s that I tasted from the estates on my itinerary were excellent in quality, and given that it is not considered a first class vintage, it may prove to be even longer-lived than one might expect, as the ripeness of the year was not optimal and may well have resulted in a bit more structure for the long haul. I have listed the wineries that I visited alphabetically here, with a very brief background sketch of each estate appearing prior to the tasting notes on the wines sampled on this trip.

Adega Avó Roxo (Meaño)

Adega Avó Roxo is currently run by Antonio Gondar Moldes, who took over the management of the family estate only in 2007. His grandfather, Serafin Gondar began production here in the 1930s and this was at one time one of the most famous wineries in the region, winning several awards as late as the 1970s. The family vineyard is one and a half hectares in size and planted entirely to Albariño and Antonio Gondar Moldes is dedicated to taking the quality here to the highest level, and Avó Roxo is one of the most recent inductees into

the growers' association in the region. Antonio is making superb wines, but at the time of my visit, he was talking about perhaps changing his natural corks over to plastic- which would be a disaster for the ageability of his wines- but, he had not yet decided to do so. Let us hope that he eschews the cheaper alternative of plastic corks and maintains his cellaring potential of his wines!

2013 Albariño-Avó Roxo (Rías Baixas)

The 2013 Albariño from Antonio Gondar is a really lovely example of the vintage, offering up a bright and vibrant bouquet of pink grapefruit, tangerine, gentle leesy undertones, stony minerality, salty soil nuances and a topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine transparency and a fairly open personality out of the blocks that will make it very user-friendly right from the start. The finish is long, zesty and shows off lovely focus and grip. 2014-2020+. **93.**

Adega Cabaleiro do Val (Meaño)

The Adega of Cabaleiro do Val is owned by Francisco “Paco” Dovalo López, who founded and is the current president of the Artisanal Growers' Association here in Rías Baixas. While the winery was only officially incorporated in 1989, the family winegrowing traditions here go back centuries and Señor Dovalo has some extremely old vines in his vineyard. Like many similar small producers around the globe, his family used to primarily sell off the production from their small vineyard holdings, only making a small amount of wine to be used for family consumption. Paco Dovalo is clearly the inspiration for many of the younger vigneron in the region, and his role in the renaissance that is quietly sweeping through the vineyards of Val do Salnés will deserve a prominent role when the history of the region is written a few decades down the road. He has taken selection massale cuttings from some of his one hundred and fifty year-old vines to use for replanting purposes, thus retaining the unique character of his outstanding Albariños. Señor Dovalo has experimented with several different cuvées with extended lees aging in stainless steel tanks, and he retains some wine still that has not yet been bottled from the outstanding vintage of 2010. While I have not tasted anywhere near as widely as I intend to do in the future from amongst the artisanal producers of Rías Baixas, it seems to me that Señor Dovalo's wines stand at the very pinnacle of the region and are amongst the most exciting dry white wines made in Spain today. I asked Paco about the potential for longevity of his wines and he commented that ten years was probably about all one could ask of Albariño to last, but he did produce a very good, if tertiary example of the 2000 vintage (which I should note, he did not care for at all!) to show that while his wines are certainly at their peak at age ten, they do possess the possibility of a bit longer evolution.

2013 Albariño- Cabaleiro do Val (Rías Baixas)

The 2013 Albariño from Cabaleiro do Val is a beautiful young wine in the making, wafting from the glass in a youthfully complex blend of bread fruit, smoke, a great base of salty minerality, orange peel, a bit of straw and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and blossoming in its complexity, with a great core of fruit, superb soil inflection and a very long, snappy and classic finish. Absolutely nothing “off vintage” about this young wine! 2016-2028+. **93+.**

2013 Albariño “Special Selection Cepas Vellas”- Cabaleiro do Val (Rías Baixas)

This is a special, old vines bottling that I believe Paco Dovalo has just begun to produce in the last few years. The 2013 is a stunning young example of Albariño, wafting from the glass in brilliant mélange of fresh pineapple, sweet grapefruit, kaleidoscopic minerality, lemongrass, wheat chaff, plenty of wet stones, gentle leesiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows superb youthful complexity, with a rock solid core, outstanding focus and cut, impeccable balance and a very, very long, electric and still quite primary finish. Stunning juice! 2016-2030+. **95.**

2012 Albariño- Cabaleiro do Val (Rías Baixas)

Paco Dovalo's 2012 Albariño is still quite closed and primary on the nose, reluctantly revealing an aromatic mix of tart pear, bread fruit, leesy tones, wet stones, lemongrass and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite tightly-knit, with a rock solid core, very refined balance, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the still quite youthful and undeveloped finish. This is going to be a very fine bottle of Albariño, but it could use another couple of years to fully blossom. 2016-2025. **92+.**

2011 Albariño- Cabaleiro do Val (Rías Baixas)

The 2011 vintage in Rías Baixas is a stronger year than either 2012 or 2013, and the 2011 version from Paco Dovalo is truly stunning wine. The bouquet soars from the glass in a blossoming mélange of white peach, nutskin, lemon blossoms, a beautifully understated touch of leesiness, smoky overtones and a glorious base of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very complex, with a seamless sense of balance and harmony, a great core of fruit, laser-like focus and a very, very long, transparent and complex finish. 2014-2030. **95.**

2011 Albariño “Special Selection Cepas Vellas”- Cabaleiro do Val (Rías Baixas)

The 2011 Special Selection Cepas Vellas from Paco Dovalo is still in tank, resting on its fine lees, and it is a magical wine in the making. The pure, complex and very refined nose offers up scents of tart orange, passion fruit, fresh almonds, lovely leesy tones, a brilliant base of salty soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and laser-like, with outstanding depth at the core, bright, zesty acids and a very, very long, poised and seamless balance. I do not know when Paco is intending to bottle this magical wine, but it will be worth checking in at the winery every few months to make sure that one does not miss its release! 2014-2030+. **95+.**

2010 Albariño “Colleita Seleccionada”- Cabaleiro do Val (Rías Baixas)

This version of the 2010 “Colleita Seleccionada” offering from Cabaleiro do Val was bottled in September of 2013 and is a touch riper than the wines from vintages such as 2012 and 2013, as it comes in at an even thirteen percent alcohol, rather than the 12.5 percent of the less thoroughly ripe vintages. It is a beautiful wine that needed a bit of time in the glass to allow its glorious fruit and mineral components to rise up through the sophisticated leesiness, but when the bouquet is fully evolved, the wine is stellar. The nose is a complex and stunning blend of white peach, fresh almond, lemon oil, sea salts, a very, very complex base of stony minerality and gentle leesiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off amazing mid-palate depth, with a seamless sense of balance, great focus and superb length and grip on the vibrant and absolutely *à point* finish. A great, great wine. 2014-2030+. **95.**

2010 Albariño “Colleita Seleccionada”- Cabaleiro do Val (Rías Baixas) Still in Tank

Amazingly, there is still another version of the 2010 “Colleita Seleccionada” from Paco Dovalo that is still resting in tank, and it is even a hair better than the above wine! The brilliantly

pure and complex nose delivers a magical aromatic constellation of pear, lemon, almonds, sweet leesiness, a touch of beeswax, sea salts, complex minerality, orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and again, very, very deep, with brilliant focus and balance, crisp acids and stunning grip on the unbelievably long and complex finish. This is the single finest example of Albariño I have ever had the pleasure to taste! 2017-2030+? **96+**.

2006 Albariño “Colleita Seleccionada”- Cabaleiro do Val (Rías Baixas)

The 2006 Albariño “Colleita Seleccionada” from Paco Dovalo was bottled, amazingly, in September of 2013 as well. The wine is stunning at its absolute zenith of peak drinkability at eight years of age, soaring from the glass in a celestial mix of almonds, walnuts, pears, tangerine, complex soil tones, a touch of wheat chaff and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and again, absolutely seamless, with a superb core of fruit, great focus and grip and a very, very long, zesty and still impressively youthful finish. I have a very hard time not imagining this wine lasting longer than the ten to twelve years out from the vintage that Señor Dovalo insists is the life expectancy of first class Albariño! 2014-2025+? **96**.

2000 Albariño- Cabaleiro do Val (Rías Baixas)

While none of the winegrowers gathered around Paco Dovalo’s table were enamored of this wine, it was still quite extant and offered up plenty of aromatic and flavor interest for those of us who like older wines. The bouquet was initially a touch oxidative, but this blew off as the wine had a chance to stretch its legs in the glass, and eventually offers up a mature and tertiary bouquet of honey, fresh rosemary, orange peel, walnuts, a touch of leather and a lovely base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite tertiary in its complexity, with a sound core, good acids and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. This wine is now in gentle decline, but it still has a few more years in it and is not a bad drink by any stretch of the imagination, though I would be more inclined to serve it with poultry today, rather than shellfish. And keep in mind, this was the regular bottling and had not received any extended period on its lees, like the above wines. 2014-2019. **89**.

Bodegas del Palacio de Fefiñanes (Cambados)

Palacio de Fefiñanes is one of the great historic estates in Rías Baixas, as it was founded in 1906 and was the first estate to register its trademark in 1928, as well as one of the first properties in the region to commercialize Albariño as a single varietal bottling. The winery today is based in sixteenth century “Grand Maison” that sits in the heart of the center of Cambados, and the property is run by its President, Juan Gil de Araújo, the Marqués de Figueroa. The wines here are made under the watchful eye of Kristina Mandilla, who is also a consulting oenologist at several other properties in Galicia. Palacio de Fefiñanes today produces three distinct bottlings of Albariño, with all of the wines spending some time on their fine lees in tank prior to bottling. The workhorse Albariño of the lineup, which is labeled as “Albariño de Fefiñanes” is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks, spends nine months on the lees and is bottled in July following the vintage. It is an excellent and very classic expression of Albariño, and as the notes below will attest, though this is in effect the estate’s “village wine”, it possesses noteworthy complexity and ages quite well. The second cuvée in the Palacio de Fefiñanes lineup is their barrel-fermented Albariño, which is named “1583” for the date that the palacio was built back in the sixteenth century. The wine is barrel-fermented and aged for four months in cask and then racked into stainless steel tanks until May of the summer following the vintage, when it is bottled. The “1583” is raised in Burgundy barrels made from the Allier forest, with the barrels on a five year rotation, so that twenty percent are new in any given

vintage. The wine was first made in the 1995 vintage and is very well done in its style and is probably the perfect introductory Albariño for white Burgundy lovers who may be new to the wines of Rías Baixas. As the notes below will attest, the “1583” bottling from Palacio de Fefiñanes also ages quite well. The top of the line wine at Palacio de Fefiñanes is their Albariño de Fefiñanes “III Año”, which was first made to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the winery, so the wine was crafted in the 2001 vintage and released in 2006. It is a selection of the oldest vines that the estate owns, which are fermented traditionally in stainless steel and then aged for twenty-seven months on the fine lees, prior to bottling. It was originally envisioned as simply a special wine to mark the one hundredth birthday of Palacio de Fefiñanes, but it proved to be so popular, that it has been produced every year since the centennial. It is quite limited, with only forty-six hundred bottles made in any given year. It is one of the greatest examples of Albariño produced in all of Rías Baixas.



2013 Albariño de Fefiñanes- Palacio de Fefiñanes

The 2013 vintage of the regular Albariño bottling from Palacio de Fefiñanes is an excellent wine, offering up a deep and bright bouquet of tart pear, gentle leesiness, salty minerality, a touch of wild fennel and a delicate topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, classy and very elegant finish. This wine will drink very well out of the blocks, but clearly has the structure to also age nicely over the next eight to ten years. 2014-2020+. **90.**

2008 Albariño de Fefiñanes- Palacio de Fefiñanes

The 2008 vintage of the regular bottling from Palacio de Fefiñanes is aging very gracefully and is really at a lovely stage of its evolution for current consumption. The complex nose offers up a very smoky mélange of peach, almonds, salty soil tones, orange peel and the aforementioned smokiness. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and nicely round on the attack, with a fine core, still sound acids and lovely length and grip on the very nicely balanced finish. Good juice and a clear indication that not only the top bottlings from Palacio de Fefiñanes age very well. 2014-2017. **89.**

2007 Albariño de Fefiñanes- Palacio de Fefiñanes

Palacio de Fefiñanes's 2007 Albariño is also drinking quite well and remains quite fresh and complex. The wine wafts from the glass in a mix of tangerine, peach, ocean breeze, sweet almond, gentle leesiness and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and still quite vibrant, with nice mid-palate concentration, lovely balance and sound framing acids on the long and seamless finish. The 2007 vintage was a touch riper than the 2008, and this has probably made this vintage a bit more generous out of the blocks, but taken just a touch of acid spine away from the wine over its aging process, so that today, the 2008 is a hair racier than the very nice 2007 version. Good juice. 2014-2017. **88.**

2013 Albariño de Fefiñanes "1583"- Palacio de Fefiñanes

The barrel-fermented 2013 version of Albariño "1583" is a very well made wine, which undergoes full malolactic fermentation, but is bottled early enough to maintain good acids. The bouquet is a fine blend of pear, ripe grapefruit, a touch of vanillin oak, salty minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and has lovely mid-palate intensity, with bright acids, a round, ripe attack, very good acids and impressive backend mineral drive on the long and complex finish. Good juice in a slightly oaky, but quite transparent style. 2014-2020+. **91+.**

2010 Albariño de Fefiñanes "1583"- Palacio de Fefiñanes

The 2010 Albariño "1583" from Palacio de Fefiñanes is fairly ripe for this cool, ocean region, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol, but this is clearly a great vintage for this wine and it is a perfectly balanced example of the year. The superb nose would delight white Burgundy lovers, as it wafts from the glass in a mélange of pear, fresh almond, gentle smokiness, subtle leesy tones, a refined base of soil and a very discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the bouncy and superbly focused finish. High class juice! 2014-2025. **93+.**

2007 Albariño de Fefiñanes "1583"- Palacio de Fefiñanes

The 2007 Albariño de Fefiñanes "1583" is an excellent wine, coming in at an even thirteen percent alcohol and today offering up a really lovely nose of baked peaches, a touch of lavender, hazelnuts, sea salts and a very gentle base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite round on the attack, with a good core and impressive backend minerality and acid bounce on the long and complex finish. With a bit of air, this wine really opens up nicely and shows that it still has a few more years of positive evolution ahead of it. 2014-2017. **90.**

2011 Albariño de Fefiñanes “III Año”- Palacio de Fefiñanes

As this bottling spends nearly two and a half years on its fine lees, the 2011 is the current release of the III Año bottling of Albariño from Palacio de Fefiñanes, and the wine is outstanding. The very pure and very serious nose wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, white peach, lime zest, refined leesiness, dried flowers and a nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, nascently complex and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with fine acidity, excellent focus and grip and a very long, beautifully balanced finish. A dynamite bottle of Albariño. 2014-2025. **94.**

2010 Albariño de Fefiñanes “III Año”- Palacio de Fefiñanes

The 2010 Albariño de Fefiñanes “III Año” is one of the great recent vintages for this wine, and at age four, it is really drinking with great youthful style and complexity. The outstanding bouquet delivers a blend of fresh pineapple, tangerine, salty minerality, a nice base of leesiness, lime peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with great focus and grip, zesty acids and beautiful balance on the long and very complex finish. This is a very, very fine bottle of Albariño! 2014-2022. **94+.**

2009 Albariño de Fefiñanes “III Año”- Palacio de Fefiñanes

The 2009 Albariño “III Año” from Palacio de Fefiñanes is also a stunning bottle, as it soars from the glass in a blaze of pear, fresh almond, plenty of smokiness, a nice base of leesiness, lime peel and *fleur de sel*. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and again shows beautiful mid-palate depth, with racy acids, superb focus and grip and a very, very long, complex and classy finish. Albariño does not get much better than this superb wine, which tips the scales at 12.5 percent alcohol and is very racy and minerally as a result. Great wine. 2014-2025. **95.**

2007 Albariño de Fefiñanes “III Año”- Palacio de Fefiñanes

The 2007 vintage of Albariño de Fefiñanes “III Año” is another absolutely outstanding bottle of wine, delivering a complex and quite vibrant bouquet of lime, pink grapefruit, lovely leesy tones, salty minerality, citrus peel and the typical smokiness of well-aged Albariño. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very complex, with a fine core of fruit, vibrant acids and excellent grip on the very long and very refined finish. This outstanding wine still has plenty of life ahead of it! 2014-2020+. **95.**

Do Ferreiro (Meaño)

Do Ferreiro is another of the very finest Albariño producers in Rías Baixas, which was founded only in 1973 by the Méndez family and who currently cultivate ten hectares of vines in the town of Meaño. The family estate is currently run by Gerardo Méndez and his two sons, who seek to make utterly classic, long-aging Albariños from their fine supply of old vines. The winery produces four distinctive white wines, a regular bottling of Albariño that is produced entirely from indigenous yeasts, low yields and is aged for eight to nine months on the lees prior to bottling, a Barrica Albariño raised in five year-old Burgundy barrels, an old vine bottling of Albariño, which is made from vines that range from one hundred to two hundred years of age, with the average age of the vines used for the eight to nine thousand bottles of their Cepas Vellas cuvée fully one hundred and fifty years of age. The fourth wine that Do Ferreiro produces is called Rebisaca, which is made from a blend of seventy-five percent Albariño, twenty percent Treixadura and five percent Loureiro. The Méndez family’s vineyards are now farmed organically, and they are clearly one of the finest stars in Rías Baixas for classically-styled, long-aging Albariños.

2013 Albariño- Do Ferreira

The really refined 2013 Albariño from Do Ferreira was bottled in June of 2014 and comes in at a cool and racy twelve percent alcohol. The lovely and youthfully complex nose wafts from the glass in a mix of grapefruit, ocean breeze, tart pear, gentle leesy tones, lime peel and a gentle touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a superb core of fruit, fine focus and balance and lovely grip on the long and snappy finish. This is a superb bottle that will only get better with a bit of bottle age. 2014-2025. **92.**

2013 Albariño “Cepas Vellas”- Do Ferreira

The 2013 Cepas Vellas bottling from Do Ferreira was also bottled this past June and tips the scales at an equally civilized twelve percent alcohol. The wine in October was still very tight and young, but oh, so promising on both the nose and palate. The primary bouquet offers up a vibrant mélange of tart pear, lime blossoms, gentle leesy tones, *fleur de sel*, citrus peel and an absolutely superb base of complex minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very youthful, with a rock solid core of fruit, laser-like focus, ripe acids and outstanding length and grip on the very, very long and transparent finish. This is going to be a dynamite wine and quite long-lived, but it really deserves at least a handful of years in the cellar to fully unwind from behind its excellent structural chassis. 2017-2030. **93+.**

2013 Rebisaca- Do Ferreira

The 2013 Rebisaca, with its unique *cépages*, is a very aromatic and very lovely bottle of wine. This too came in at an even twelve percent alcohol and possess a lovely spine of minerality, to go along with a very aromatic bouquet of lime, grapefruit, a touch of menthol, beautiful soil tones, citrus peel and a whisper of leesiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully delineated, with a good core of fruit, crisp acids and lovely focus on the long and zesty finish. A lovely wine that will age very well. 2014-2025. **92.**

2013 Albariño “Barrica”- Do Ferreira

The Méndez family is very discreet with their use of oak for this wine, as the barrels are all at least five years of age before any Albariño is committed to them, and then the wine does not undergo malolactic fermentation, to keep the acids nice and racy in augmentation to the gentle touch of roundness and vanilla that the older barrels impart in the wine. The result is a very classy wine, which offers up a lovely nose of pear, a nice touch of botanicals, lovely minerality, a touch of smokiness and a very discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and quite lively, with a fine core of fruit, a very good base of minerality, lovely balance and a long, classy and quite vibrant finish. A beautiful and quite seamless synthesis of Albariño fruit, minerality and gentle oakiness. High class juice. 2014-2020. **92.**

2007 Albariño “Cepas Vellas” - Do Ferreira

According to S. Méndez, the “2007 vintage is one of the greatest vintages we have ever done here” and at age seven, the Cepas Vellas is really coming right into its primetime window of drinkability. The excellent bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex mix of pear, smoke, orange peel, a touch of walnut, menthol and a lovely underpinning of oceanic brininess. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with excellent acids, fine focus and a very long, complex and absolutely *à point* finish. A beautiful bottle of wine. 2014-2025. **94.**

2006 Albariño “Cepas Vellas” - Do Ferreira

The 2006 Cepas Vellas is another absolutely lovely bottle of Albariño at its apogee, as the wine offers up a lovely aromatic constellation of fresh apricot, orange peel, dried eucalyptus, a superb base of salty soil tones and a Vatan-like touch of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with excellent cut and focus, lovely elegance and a long, zesty and fully mature finish. The 2006 is a bit more evolved than the 2007 version, but every bit as fresh and electric on the palate. Fine, fine juice. 2014-2020+. **93.**

2009 Rebisaca- Do Ferreira

The 2009 Rebisaca is drinking at its peak and also shows that this cuvée has no difficulty aging here as well, as this wine still has plenty of life ahead of it as well. The deep and very classy nose jumps from the glass in a mix of pear, orange, menthol, stony minerality, gentle nuttiness and a lovely topnote of botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and focused, with a fine core, lovely complexity, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the vibrant finish. A lovely wine at its peak and again, with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2014-2020+. **93.**



One of Gerardo Méndez's sons serving a bottle of the family's very old vine cuvée of Albariño.

Lagar de Broullón (Meaño)

Lagar de Broullón is owned by José Pintos, who farms this two and a half hectare vineyard in the village of Meaño, which is one of the very finest for Albariño in the Val de Salnés section of Rías Baixas. The family's two and a half hectares of vineyards are situated with a south by southwest exposition, allowing the grapes to reach fine ripeness each year and still maintain a great base of minerality. Señor Pintos focuses on doing great viticultural work throughout the year, and then making the wines as traditionally as possible in the cellars, with only the most minimal of intervention. Sounds a little like Burgundy, no?

2013 Albariño- Lagar de Broullón (Rías Baixas)

The 2013 from José Pintos is a really lovely wine, tipping the scales at a cool 12.5 percent octane and offering up a superb bouquet of tart orange, lemon, salty soil tones, a deft touch of leesiness, white flowers and a touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely focused, with a lovely core, bright acids and excellent balance and grip on the long and quite open finish. This is still early days for this lovely Albariño, but it is not reserved in personality and is already a lovely drink right out of the blocks. 2014-2025. **93+**.

2011 Albariño “Colleita Seleccionada”- Lagar de Broullón (Rías Baixas)

The 2011 “Colleita Seleccionada” from José Pintos is a brilliant young wine, but it will be mostly of interest to wine lovers in Asia, as the entire tank was purchased by his Taiwanese importer and bottled under a private label called Meigas Fora. There were only eight hundred bottles of this superb wine produced, which was aged for two and a half years on its fine lees in stainless steel tank prior to bottling. The bouquet is deep and just starting to blossom fully, soaring from the glass in a complex blend of lemon, tart orange, a touch of leesiness, *fleur de sel*, citrus oils, great minerality and a touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with excellent mid-palate intensity, bright acids and a very, very long, vibrant and utterly seamless finish. Great juice with years and years of life still ahead of it! 2014-2030. **94+**.

Lagar de Candes (Meaño)

Eulogio Gondar is the owner and winegrower at Lagar de Candes, and he represents the fourth generation of his family to head this small estate, which is also located in the village of Meaño, in the Val de Salnés section of Rías Baixas. The soils here are granitic in nature, producing beautifully mineral expressions of Albariño.

2013 Albariño- Lagar de Candes (Rías Baixas)

The 2013 from Lagar de Candes is an excellent example of this vintage and a clear indication that there are going to be some very special wines produced in 2012 in Rías Baixas, despite the middling reputation of the vintage! The superb nose wafts from the glass in a mélange of lemon, wet stones, fresh-cut lime, ocean breeze, wet stones and citrus blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very zesty, with lovely focus and grip, excellent concentration in the mid-palate and a very long, vibrant and racy finish. This looks likely to be one of the longer-lived Albariños from the 2013 vintage. Fine, fine juice. 2014-2025. **93+**.

Bodega Meis Otero (Meaño)

Bodega Meis Otero is owned and operated by the Fernando Meis Otero, who is one of the very youngest members of the Asociación de Bodegas Artesanas. He took over the reins of his family's adega in 2001, but his father, (who is also named Fernando), had only produced his first vintage of O'Forrollo Albariño in 1990, as the family previously sold off their production to one of the larger wineries in the region. Like many of the fellow members of the growers' association, the Bodega Meis Otero vineyards are located in the Val de Salnés and in the town of Meaño. The family's one and a half hectares of vines used to be planted to a mix of regional grapes, but Fernand Meis Otero's father took the step to plant exclusively Albariño here in the early 1980s. Thus, the vineyards are just now coming into their prime as they close in on thirty years of age, though by the high standards of Rías Baixas, where so many vines are between one hundred and two hundred years of age, these are still very young vines! But, Señor Meis is making splendid wines and they are clearly amongst the greatest to be found in the region, so no need to wait another hundred years for the vines to get to a proper old age by Galician standards!

2013 Albariño “O'Forrollo”- Bodega Meis Otero (Rías Biexas)

The 2013 Albariño from Fernando Meis Otero had just been bottled a couple of weeks prior to my visit in early October of this year, and the wine had clearly not yet recovered from the *mise*. Despite it still being a bit shaken, it is deep, full-bodied and very pure and I have little doubt that this will be an outstanding example of the vintage when it has had a chance to recover a bit from its recent bottling. But, I did not want to try and score it in such an unsettled state.

2012 Albariño “O'Forrollo”- Bodega Meis Otero (Rías Biexas)

The 2012 O'Forrollo Albariño was bottled in September of 2013, after nine to ten months of aging on its fine lees. The wine underwent full malolactic fermentation and is really starting to drink with great authority after one year in bottle. The nose is a superb blend of pear, incipient almond tones, citrus peel, stony minerality, just a bit of Chablis-like hay and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, vibrant and full-bodied, with a rock solid core of fruit, great focus and cut and a very long, complex and classy finish. High class juice here! 2014-2025+. **94.**

Adega Rozas (Meaño)

Adega Rozas is also located in the village of Meaño in the Val de Salnés and is run by winegrower Manolo Dovalo. This family estate goes back several generations, and its 6.3 hectares of vineyards are loaded with old vines- many dating back more than a hundred years. Señor Dovalo insists that it is the very high percentage of old vines in this very favored section of the Val de Salnés that allows him to make such outstanding Albariños. Like many of the producers in the artisanal growers' association, the Dovalo family has made wine for its own consumption for generations, but for many years the lion's share of their production was sold off to larger wineries in the area. Manolo Dovalo likes to say that his family winery has managed to perfectly synthesize the traditional style of winemaking the region with some of the modern winemaking techniques (such as temperature controlled fermentation) to allow for a more complete expression of the classical style of Meaño Albariño. These are amongst the best examples of Albariño produced today in Galicia.

2013 Albariño- Rozas (Rías Baixas)

The 2013 Rozas Albariño is another outstanding example of this vintage, with its low octane personality of twelve percent giving the wine lovely cut and bounce on the palate. The classy nose jumps from the glass in a mix of grapefruit, sea salts, lemon peel, gentle smokiness, a bit of straw and a topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and intensely flavored, with a nice core of fruit, a pretty wide open profile, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2014-2020+. **92.**

Monterrei

The region of Monterrei lies further south in Galicia than most of the major wine-producing regions in this magical corner of northwest Spain, with the D.O. right on the Portuguese border. The soils here tend to have more clay in them than further north in the more stony vineyards of central Galicia, and Godello and Mencía are the two workhorse grapes of this small region.

Adegas Triay (Oimbra)

Adegas Triay is located in the small village of Oimbra, right on the Portuguese border in southernmost Galicia, with the nearest small city being Verín, just to the east of Oimbra. This small family winery is now run by Antonio Triay and his wife Puri, whose family owned the parcels of vines that now form the backbone of the estate's vineyard holdings. Antonio's father-in-law is still quite active helping out in the vines and cellars, and as he likes to say, "I always took good care of the vineyards and was careful making the wines in the past, when no one really cared about the wines of Monterrei, but now, it has served my daughter and son-in-law quite well to have good vineyards to work with." Antonio blends a small amount of Albariño and Treixadura into his Godello bottling (five percent each), and includes ten percent Tempranillo in his Mencía bottling. Production here is very small, but the wines are riveting, with great purity and complexity, and Adegas Triay is destined to be one of the stars of Galicia in the years to come.

2013 Mencía- Adegas Triay

The 2013 vintage was a bit riper than the norm in Monterrei, with Antonio Triay's Mencía coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol in this year. The wine is young, but going to be absolutely lovely, as it offers up a nascently complex nose of pomegranate, dark berries, graphite, a touch of woodsmoke and a topnote of espresso. On the palate the wine is fullish, long and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, a bit of tannin to resolve and a long, focused and classy finish. This is high class Mencía! 2014-2025. **90.**

2012 Mencía- Adegas Triay

The 2012 vintage of Mencía from Señor Triay is outstanding, with its slightly lower octane of thirteen percent producing even more purity on the nose and more structure on the palate. The excellent nose jumps from the glass in a blend of sweet dark berries, a touch of meatiness, tree bark, espresso, a nice touch of botanicals and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with a sappy core of fruit, excellent soil signature, moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the very long finish that closes with a nice touch of youthful pepperiness. Even better than the 2013 Mencía! 2016-2030+. **92+.**

2013 Godello- Adegas Triay

The 2013 Godello from Adegas Triay is outstanding, as it delivers a superb bouquet of white peach, a touch of menthol, stony minerality, tart banana, a touch of green olive and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and absolutely rock solid at the core, with great acids and mineral drive on the backend, fien focus and a very long and vibrant finish. Great juice. 2014-2020+. **93.**



Antonio Triay, with his wife Puri and father-in-law Isaac García, in the family cellars in Oimbra.

2011 Godello- Adegas Triay

The 2011 Godello from Antonio Triay is also outstanding, and may well nose out the 2013 in the fullness of time. The exceptional nose offers up a constellation of pear, white peach, a touch of butter, spring flowers, salty soil tones, fresh almonds and just a whisper of the honeysuckle to come in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and focused, with outstanding mid-palate depth and complexity, vibrant acids and laser-like focus on the very pure and very classy long finish. This is great Godello! 2014-2025+. **94.**

2010 Godello- Adegas Triay

The 2010 Godello from Adegas Triay is also a superb wine, but it is a touch more reserved in personality than the magical 2011 version. The pure and refined nose offers up scents of white peach, lemon blossoms, salty soil tones, fresh almond, a touch of tangerine and a bit of vanilla bean in the upper register (despite the wine being raised entirely in stainless steel tank). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, very pure on the attack, with a great core, lovely soil signature and outstanding length and grip on the complex, focused and vibrant finish.

Another stellar bottle of Godello that seems likely to cruise along for at least another fifteen years in bottle. I would love to taste this and the 2011 side by side in another five years, just to see which ultimately outpaces the other! 2014-2030. 94.

Ribeiro

Ribeiro lies between Rías Baixas and Ribeira Sacra, with its specialty white wines, but here, the very aromatic Treixadura grape tends to take prominence and Albariño plays a supporting role in the blended whites of the region. Other white wine varieties that find the region commodious include Alvilla, Godello (a recent import from nearby Valdeorras), Loureiro and Torrentés, with the latter grape not related to the white wine grape of the same name prevalent today in Argentina, but rather the same as the Terrantez grape found on the island of Madeira. There is a little bit of red wine produced still in Ribeiro as well, but the claim to the rising fame of the region is the excellent white wines produced here. Like all of the D.O.s of Galicia, cooler temperatures allow the grapes grown in Ribeiro to retain good natural acidity levels, so that acidulation is not necessary here, and the wines tend to be quite transparent in personality. The soils here are sandy topsoils over a deep granite base, so there is plenty of stoniness to add soil complexity to the wines. Grapes were thought to be first planted in Ribeiro by the Romans, and in the thirteenth century, when the Cistercians arrived *en masse* in Galicia, they greatly expanded the land under vine in this region. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ribeiro was most famous for its sweet wines, called locally *Vinos Tostados*, which were made from grapes that were sun-dried for three months prior to pressing and fermentation. There is still a small amount of these lovely dessert wines produced in Ribeiro, but they have become a very minor percentage of overall wine production in the region.

Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

Bodegas Manuel Formigo is currently run by Manuel Formigo de la Fuente, the thirty-four year-old winemaker who took over full-time responsibilities for the family winery in the province of Ourense (which also includes Ribeira Sacra, further east of Ribeiro) from his father, Augustín Formigo, back in the 2006 vintage. The estate produces primarily two white wines, their superb, Finca Teira Branco, which is produced from a blend of seventy percent Treixadura, twenty percent Godello and ten percent Torrentés, and their equally impressive Teira X bottling, which is made from a slightly different grape blend, with the cépages being sixty percent Treixadura (from thirty year-old vines), fifteen percent each of Alvilla and Albariño and ten percent Loureira. Father and son Formigo have crafted beautiful terraced vineyards right alongside their winery in the village of Beade, which lies due west of the city of Ourense on the western end of the DO of Ribeiro. The winemaking facility is new in the last year or two, and as Manuel Formigo likes to note, "it is extremely functional, as we have built it right into the hillside that houses the vineyards, so that everything can now be done by gravity and we do not need to pump the juice during the winemaking process, which should make for even finer wines in the future." Manuel kindly put together full verticals of both Finca Teira Branco and Teira X dating back to his first vintage here in charge, 2006, and the wines showed just how beautifully well-made Ribeiro whites can age, as even the 2006s remained very fresh and vibrant and had plenty of life still ahead of them. This is a small winery, with production only reaching eleven hundred cases of Finca Teira and less than two hundred of Teira X, but the new winemaking facilities have room for a bit of expansion, and Manuel is constantly working on the hillside vineyards around the bodega, expanding the terraces and adding small parcels of vines, so there

may well be a bit more of the estate's excellent wines to go around in the years to come. I complimented Manuel for his foresight in keeping back a few bottles of his earlier vintages in the cellars and thus making these two verticals possible, but he laughed and said "that it would not have been possible when he first started to keep any cases back," as he was just getting started and the plans for a new winemaking facility required selling everything he produced to keep the bank happy, but, "we had a client in (the nearby city of) Vigo who would go on to the next vintage when it was released, and it was possible to buy back a handful of bottles of these older vintages in recent times, so that we could have just a bit of a library in the cellars here." The estate still produces a bit of the region's historical sweet wine, which Manuel Formigo makes in a solera style in a single barrel, that he began during his second harvest at the winery in 2007. Today, his Tostado includes wine produced from the 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2013 vintages.



Manuel Formigo de la Fuente, contemplating a vertical of his Finca Teira bottling at the winery.

Finca Teira Branco

2013 Finca Teira Branco - Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

The 2013 Finca Teira is a lovely wine, offering up a very aromatic bouquet of pear, lemon zest, a touch of green olive, a touch of wild fennel, salty, stony soil tones and a gentle

topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very well-balanced, with a good core, ripe acids and lovely length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. As this vertical so clearly demonstrated, the 2013 Finca Teira should really start to come into its prime in another couple of years and have no difficulties lasting at least a dozen years. It is of course quite approachable today, but the best is yet to come for this lovely wine. 2016-2026+. **89+**.

2012 Finca Teira Branco - Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

The 2012 Finca Teira Branco shows just how nicely this wine blossoms with a bit of bottle age, as already it is showing quite a lot more floral and savory elements on the nose, from just the additional year's worth of bottle age over the 2013. The wine jumps from the glass in an excellent constellation of pear, white peach, honeysuckle, wild fennel and a beautiful base of complex minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with bright acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is still on the youthful side, but it is beginning to really drink with personality. Still, I would be inclined to keep it tucked away in the cellar another couple of years and really let its secondary layers of complexity emerge. 2016-2025+. **90+**.

2011 Finca Teira Branco - Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

I last tasted the 2011 Finca Teira Branco back in the spring of 2012, so I was very interested to see how the wine had developed over the ensuing two and a half years. It is aging quite nicely and is now offering up a maturing nose of pear, green olive, salty minerality, a whisper of the honey to come with further bottle age, a bit of wet stoniness, citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now wide open and drinking beautifully, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance and a very long, complex and vibrant finish. A lovely bottle. 2014-2020+. **91**.

2010 Finca Teira Branco - Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

I had a bottle of the 2010 Finca Teira Branco back in the spring of 2012 as well, and based on this recent showing at the winery, it is quite clear that the bottle tasted back then was not entirely perfect, as this bottle was absolutely singing and at its apogee. The 2010 vintage produced a slightly racier and less ripe example of Finca Teira, as this wine came in at 12.5 percent alcohol, when most vintages these days will be an event thirteen percent. At age four, the wine is just singing on both the nose and palate, as it offers up scents of pear, honeydew melon, salty soil tones, a nice note of beeswax, citrus peel and just a dollop of honeycomb. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core, excellent focus and grip and a very long, *à point* and beautifully balanced finish. A beautiful bottle of Ribeiro at its apogee, but still with plenty of life ahead of it! 2014-2022. **92+**.

2009 Finca Teira Branco - Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

Manuel Formigo's 2009 Finca Teira is also at its peak and drinking with great breed and style, as the wine soars from the glass in a complex mélange of tangerine, lemon peel, pear, beeswax, a bit of petrol, salty soil tones and a nice touch of wild fennel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with lovely roundness on the attack, crisp acids, a superb core of fruit and excellent focus and grip on the long and classy finish. Another beautiful bottle of Ribeiro Branco at its peak of drinkability. 2014-2020. **92**.

2008 Finca Teira Branco - Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

The 2008 was a more difficult vintage in Ribeiro, and the Finca Teira only managed to climb to twelve percent alcohol in this year, as ripeness was not as abundant as is typical in this region. The wine is quite a bit more mature than either the 2010 or 2009, offering up a tertiary

bouquet of tangerine, lemon, a touch of fresh rosemary, pit fruits and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and fully mature, with still good acidity, but with the fruit chassis starting to get a little creaky and signs of imminent decline are in evidence. The wine remains quite long on the backend and is still drinking very well at age six, but this was clearly not a long-distance runner from the outset and it is best drunk up in the next couple of years. 2014-2016. **88.**

2007 Finca Teira Branco - Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

2007 was another lower octane vintage for the Finca Teira, but this wine is far more youthful in its development than the 2008 version and is one of the finest vintages for Manuel since he took over full-time responsibilities here in 2006. The wine is twelve percent octane and simply soars from the glass in a beautifully complex blend of peach, lemon blossoms, beeswax, butter, a complex base of salty soil tones, fresh nutmeg and just a bit of acacia blossom still remaining in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a superb core, laser-like focus, still very sound acidity and great balance and grip on the very long and focused finish that closes with a distinctive note of citrus peel. One of the finest Ribeiro white wines I have had the pleasure to taste, the 2007 Finca Teira still has years ahead of it. 2014-2020+. **94.**

2006 Finca Teira Branco - Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

Manuel's first vintage of Finca Teira is cruising along beautifully and it too shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The wine is a touch riper than the 2007 version, coming in at 12.6 percent alcohol and offers up a beautifully complex bouquet of pear, pineapple, butter, dried flowers, beeswax, citrus peel, wild fennel, salty soil tones and an exotic topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and fully mature, with a lovely core, sound acids and a long, focused and still very classy finish. Lovely juice. 2014-2019. **92.**

Teira X

The Teira X bottling is made from some of the oldest vines that the Formigo family owns, so its cépages is a bit more old-fashioned for Ribeiro, with grapes like Alvilla, Albariño and Loureira augmenting the Treixadura in this cuvée. The wine does not always show the same mid-palate amplitude as the Finca Teira bottling, which probably derives from the latter's inclusion of twenty percent Godello in the blend, and the wine typically will be just a touch less ripe than the Finca Teira, as 12.5 percent alcohol seems to be its normal octane in classic years. Teira X seems to be a bit more expressive aromatically out of the blocks than the Finca Teira, perhaps as a result of its inclusion of Albariño and Loureira in the blend. It is a beautiful wine and I hope that a bit more of it will be produced in the future, when some of the newer parcels start to come on line to augment production of the Finca Teira bottling, as the Teira X is one of Spain's finest white wine bottlings.

2013 Teira X- Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

The 2013 Teira X is a bit higher octane than is classic for this bottling, coming in at an even thirteen percent, but the wine was showing beautiful potential at the time of my visit to the bodega, as it wafts from the glass in a very floral aromatic blend of pear, white peach, acacia blossoms, lovely minerality, a touch of coriander seed, sea salts and a whisper of vanilla bean in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very refined on the attack, with a great core, zesty acidity and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Fine juice in the making. 2017-2030+. **93+.**



Some of Manuel Formigo's terraced vines in the vineyard of Finca Miño Teira, where the Teira X is sourced.

2012 Teira X- Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

The 2012 vintage of Teira X is quite classic in size and shape, coming in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and offering up a superb bouquet of peach, lavender, acacia blossom, a touch of butter, lemon chiffon, just a hint of green olive and a classy base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and wide open today, with excellent mid-palate depth, superb complexity and a very long, bright and bouncy finish. Lovely juice that is drinking already with great style. 2014-2025. **93.**

2011 Teira X- Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

Whereas the 2007 vintage looks to be the reference point for the Finca Teira bottling since Manuel took over the reins of the family bodega, the 2011 Teira X is his *magnum opus*, and this is the finest wine he has yet produced in his young and very promising career! The brilliant nose of the 2011 soars from the glass in a blaze of tangerine, pear, acacia blossom, complex, salty soil tones, orange peel, wild fennel, a bit of smokiness and honeysuckle. I love the exotic combination of smoky, savory elements and the musky floral tones on the nose here. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and absolutely rock solid at the core, with vibrant acidity, laser-like focus and simply stunning grip on the very, very long and complex finish. I had no idea that Ribeiro whites could attain this level of complexity and elegance! While the 2011 Teira X is a superb glass of wine today, my gut instinct is that it will be even better with

further bottle age and I would try to give it another couple of years in the cellar before drinking it up, as it clearly still has miles to go before it sleeps. 2016-2030+. **95+**.

2010 Teira X- Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

I last crossed paths with a bottle of the 2010 Teira X back in the spring of 2012, and the wine is evolving very nicely indeed and is now wide open at age four and ready for primetime drinking. The lovely nose offers up a mature blend of buttered pears, lemon oil, a touch of lavender, a beautifully complex base of salty soil tones and a bit of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a fine core, bright acids and fine length and grip on the *à point* finish. This will not be one of the longest-lived vintages of Teira X, but the wine is at its prime and should continue to drink very well through the end of the decade. 2014-2020. **92**.

2009 Teira X- Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

The 2009 Teira X is also excellent and at its apogee today. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pear, peach, tangerine, butter, musky floral tones, a gentle touch of lavender and a bit of straw in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows lovely mid-palate depth, with a fully mature personality, fine focus and grip and a long, vibrant finish. The 2009 vintage has produced a classic example of Teira X, and the wine still has plenty of life ahead of it, but like the 2010, it has reached its zenith of evolution and is now ready to go. 2014-2020. **92+**.

2008 Teira X- Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

The 2008 Teira X is also into its plateau of peak maturity and offers up impressive complexity on both the nose and palate, but I get the sense that there is nothing left in reserve here and that it will be at its best if drunk up over the next four or five years. The excellent bouquet delivers a mélange of baked pears, lemon oil, beeswax, sweet almonds, butter, a fine base of soil and a topnote of lemon blossoms. In fact, there is more than a touch of mature Raveneau Chablis tones to be found here, though of course, the soil signatures are quite different. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with lovely focus and balance, still a superb core of fruit and a very long, bright and fully mature finish. A lovely bottle. 2014-2019. **92**.

2006 Teira X- Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

The 2006 Teira X is also fully mature today at age eight and drinking with great style and personality. The wine is best on the nose at this point in its evolution, as it offers up a stunning constellation of buttered pears, lemon blossoms, almonds, salty soil tones, lavender and a slightly savory topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still beautifully balanced, but with the acids starting to soften up just a bit, so that the wine is now quite silky on the backend and clearly at its peak of maturity. The finish remains very long and still very fresh, so there is no immediate need to drink this wine up, but it will start looking over the far side of the plateau in the not too distant future, and this is a very good time to be finishing up bottles. 2014-2017+? **91**.

Tostado- Bodegas Manuel Formigo (Ribeiro)

As I noted above, Manuel Formigo is only making a single barrel of his Tostado, with the wine made solera style, and the new vintage's addition added to the blend and an appropriate amount of the solera bottled off to make room for what the new year is going to provide in the barrel's blend. The wine is fifteen percent alcohol and carries one hundred and ten grams per

liter of residual sugar! The lovely nose offers up scents of honey, walnuts, orange peel, browned butter and a very smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focus and impressively light on its feet, with very good acids and excellent length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. A lovely bottle. 2014-2025+. **93.**

Ribeira Sacra

The region of the Ribeira Sacra, or the “Sacred River” (or more correctly, the Sacred Riverbanks), was first planted to vines in Roman times, but its terraced vineyard layout as we know it today can also be credited to the handiwork of the Cistercians and other great monastic orders of the Middle Ages, who first settled in this breathtakingly beautiful section of Galicia in the twelfth century, arriving over the Pyrenees from their lands in France. It was the Romans, who first built the terraced vineyards that rise up seemingly right out of the rivers of the Miño and Sil and tower up the steep slate and granite hillsides that overshadow these beautiful river valleys. Historical records note the first arrival of the Romans in Ribeira Sacra in the time of Jesus Christ, with the Romans arriving here in AD 24 and settling in to exploit the mineral wealth of the region at this time, which was to be found in substantial gold deposits along both the Miño and Sil Rivers. The Romans mined gold very successfully in this part of Galicia for two hundred and fifty years, and in addition to digging mines and diverting the rivers in places to more fully exploit the loads, they also carved out the terraces on the hillsides above the rivers to serve as vineyards for the wine they would need during their extended stay in Ribeira Sacra. Over time, the wine from Ribeira Sacra became famous back in Rome, and the “Amandi” wine was shipped back to the capital for the express use of the Emperor and his court. This is still a very isolated section of Spain, with a great expansion of roadways here in the 1990s and early in the twenty-first century making it far more accessible than it was only thirty years ago, and one can only imagine what it was like in these mountainous river valleys at the times that the Romans were encamped here mining for gold (albeit with slave labor). But, even with the expansion of roadways here in recent times, this is hardly at the crossroads of Spain and much of the magnificent, rugged beauty of canyons, mountainsides and beautiful river valleys has been preserved in Ribeira Sacra, complete with the same sense of serene isolation that made this such an “off the grid” destination in early Christian times.

With the decline of the Roman empire, the Ribeira Sacra region experienced one of its cyclical declines in population as well, which were to be revisited upon the region from time to time in the centuries that followed, and it was not until the sixth century that the region again began to be find settlers interested in finding a place for themselves within the confines of its natural beauty. The extreme isolation of the region became one of its chief advantages for this next wave of immigrants into the region, as religious orders began to set up Hermitages here for the religiously-inclined who wished to escape or retire from the more worldly realities of Christian life in other parts of western and southern Europe at this time, or perhaps sought escape from persecution if their particular flavor of Christianity was deemed unorthodox or heretical by the Roman church officials. Keep in mind that at this time in Europe, at the close of the fifth century, Merovingian kings had just united most of what is present day France and western Germany under their rule, and had established an accord with the Roman Christian church to spread Christianity throughout their dominions. One of the last areas that they conquered was the Languedoc region of southern France, found just over the Pyrenees to the north of Galicia, which heretofore had been the land of the Visigoths and whom were no friends of the Roman church.

As the Merovignians expanded their rule over much of the Languedoc, the Visigoths retreated over the Pyrenees south into what is today Galicia and western Cataluña, and it is likely that many of the early “religious pilgrims” that relocated to the Ribeira Sacra region to these early Hermitages did so to escape feared religious persecution at the hands of Roman church officials, seeking isolated mountain retreats along the rivers Miño and Sil.



Beautifully terraced vineyards, near Belesar, overlooking the Miño River in Ribeira Sacra.

In any event, whatever the historical forces that started new immigrants finding their way into Ribeira Sacra in the sixth century, the real flowering of the region, in relative terms, began in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as the expansion of these religious Hermitages eventually gave life to full-blown monasteries in the region. The great monastic orders of the Middle Ages, the Cistercians and the Benedictines, were soon well-encamped and flourishing throughout

Ribeira Sacra and viticulture in the region once again began to blossom. It was at this time that the region received the name that it carries down to this day, as in the forty square kilometer area around the small city of Monforte de Lemos, which today serves as the unofficial capital of Ribeira Sacra, there were fully one hundred and sixty monasteries and churches founded and thriving in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with many of them located on the places of ancient Roman churches in the area. The “sacred” riverbanks of the region take their name from this era, where religious orders were settled so densely that Queen Theresa of Portugal dubbed the region as the “Rivoyra Sacra” in 1124, from which the name of Ribeira Sacra is derived. However, the term could have equally been employed to describe the magical and majestic beauty of the steep mountainsides and canyons that define the region, with this natural beauty clearly creating one of the most awe-inspiring backdrops for viticulture in the world, and it is very easy to appreciate why these religious hermits and monastic orders sought to settle here in its serene beauty during the Middle Ages. It was the monastic orders that set about reclaiming the terraced vineyards that had originally been carved out of the mountainsides by the Romans and their slaves during the first two and a half centuries of the first millennium A.D. The Benedictines, in fact, revitalized the production and exportation of wine from the Amandi sub-region of Ribeira Sacra, with this wine once again finding great favor amongst Europe’s ecclesiastical aristocracy in the Middle Ages.

From the Middle Ages forward, the viticultural legacy of the Ribeira Sacra seemed to stagnate, after its moment in the sun when the Benedictine’s “Amandi Wine” was the rage with European Church aristocracy. Wine continued to be produced from the reclaimed, steep terraced vineyards that tower over the rivers in Ribeira Sacra, but it became more and more a wine that was grown to be consumed locally at the plethora of monastic and church locations in the region, as well as among the local population that assisted with its production, and it was certainly not a famous wine in Christendom. With the arrival of phylloxera to the region at the close of the nineteenth century, wine cultivation dropped off to almost nothing, and given the expense and backbreaking work that was required to replant the very steep terraced vineyards of Ribeira Sacra, a very, very large percentage of the region’s vineyards were simply allowed to go fallow and the wild encroached on many former vineyards in the region. Given the tumultuous history of Spain throughout much of the twentieth century, as civil war was followed by a long fascist dictatorship and attendant economic malaise, there was very little incentive for the replanting of vineyards in Ribeira Sacra and cultivation of the vine, which dated back nearly two millennia in the region, hovered on the verge of extinction throughout most of the 1900s, and it was really only as the twenty-first century dawned that viticulture began to be resuscitated in Ribeira Sacra. During much of the Franco era, the young of Ribeira Sacra decamped for other regions with better prospects, and even to this day, Ribeira Sacra has one of the oldest populations to be found anywhere in Spain.

However, in the 1990s, winegrowing prospects in Ribeira Sacra started a tepid renewal, and as global warming began to throw its weight around in other, more easily-farmed Spanish wine regions, the cooler subzones of Ribeira Sacra began to look more and more attractive. While there continues to be a few older generation winegrowers in the region, who soldiered through the dark days when there was little or no market for their wines, but they kept doggedly hiking up and down their steep terraces of vines and keeping alive their vinous history in the region, much of the current winemaking sparks that are shining out in the region are the results

of the hard work of a very new and young generation of winemakers and winegrowers, who have either returned to their family's roots in Ribeira Sacra from other parts of Spain, or have identified the region as offering tremendous *terroir* and opportunity for excellence in the near future and have staked a claim for the future of wine in Ribeira Sacra. Having spent a handful of days traipsing around the steep, cantilevered terraces of vines in the region, meeting winegrowers and tasting a great many wines, it is quite clear that the old guard winemakers and the new arrivals are clearly correct in singling out Ribeira Sacra for its fine present reality of high-quality wine and even more promising future, and this is destined to be one of the finest wine-producing regions in all of Spain in the years to come. If I were a young, aspiring winemaker (without vertigo) who loved wines of *terroir* and was not adverse to plenty of hard work, in exchange for a great opportunity, I would be turning my sights to the region of Ribeira Sacra today!

When one thinks of the wines of Ribeira Sacra these days, one invariably thinks of red wines made (primarily) from the superb Mencía grape, but there are several other red wine grape varieties that are also allowed in the D.O. In addition, there are some excellent white wines produced these days in Ribeira Sacra, with Godello and Treixadura the most widely cultivated white wine varieties. However, despite its relatively ancient history of wine production, stretching back nearly two thousand years to the Romans first arrival here, the official recognition of the Ribeira Sacra is a very new phenomenon, as the region did not receive a D.O. from Spanish wine officials until 1996! The rules of the D.O. tacitly recognize the realities of the vines on these steep hillsides, as the grapes allowed to be grown in the vineyards of Ribeira Sacra are “encouraged varieties”, rather than “permitted varieties”, as a great, great many of these terraced vineyards are still planted with field blends that include several other old, indigenous grapes beyond Mencía, Godello and Treixadura. In several of the oldest vineyards, and there are indeed still plenty of very, very old vines in Ribeira Sacra (vines that have already reached the century mark are not rare!), no one is really one hundred percent certain what is planted where, but everyone will agree that the field blends of those very old vines make great wines! Since the establishment of the D.O. in 1996, many of the abandoned terraces are being reclaimed and replanted to vines, so the production numbers here are starting to climb, but there remains plenty of terraces that are either still fallow, or overgrown, and it is rather amazing in 2014, to see so many great potential vineyards, on brilliant *terroir*, still readily available for the intrepid! A similar situation might have existed in places like Côte-Rôtie or Cornas after World War II, but those days are now long gone in almost all of the regions of the wine world with indisputably great *terroir*, with the exceptions of a very few places like the Mosel and Ribeira Sacra!

The towering hillside terraces that house the vast, vast majority of vines in Ribeira Sacra are embedded on either soils composed of slate or granite, with the composition varying by sub-region in Ribeira Sacra. There are five distinct sub-region in Ribeira Sacra, which run from the most westerly section of the D.O. (starting due north of the city of Ourense) towards the east: Chantada (on the northern stretches of the Miño River in the D.O.), Ribeiras do Miño (south of Chantada and where the confluence of the Miño and the Sil River occurs), Amandi (further to the east, on the central section of the D.O. on the Sil River, south of the city of Monforte do Lemos and home to the highest peaks and the most precipitous vineyard inclines in the region), Ribeiras do Sil (further east along the river from Amandi) and Quiroga-Bibeí (on the far eastern end of

the D.O, and the only part of Ribeira Sacra where some vineyards are planted on flatter vineyard lands and not on the steep, terraced slopes that define the other sub-regions). While the central sub-region of Amandi has been considered the finest in Ribeira Sacra stretching all the way back to Roman and Benedictine times, my impression, based on my first visit and some recent tasting in the last few years, that the only sub-region that cannot quite match the others for potential is Quiroga-Bibei, where good grapes can be grown in some of the flatter vineyards, but where the *terroir* is not in quite the same league as the steep, terraced slopes found in all the other sub-regions. Most of the granitic soils are found in Chantada, with a mix of slate and granite further south along the Miño River in the sub-region of Ribeiras do Miño. In the central section of Amandi, the terraces tend to be planted on pure slate, with the mix of granitic and slate-based soils returning further east in the Ribeiras do Sil sub-region, and the vineyards of Quiroga-Bibei being slate and schist mixed in heavier clay soils on the flatter sections (though there are also some, steep purely granitic-slate vineyards here also to be found in the areas that directly overlook the Sil River).

As I have alluded to in this long introduction on the wines of Ribeira Sacra, I firmly believe that the potential for world class red wines (not that the white wines here are bad by any stretch of the imagination!) in this region is nearly unlimited, and we are only in the very first days of the realization of the quality that these wines will routinely (if one can say “routine”, when cultivating steep terraces that can run to fully 90 or 100 degrees in slope!) achieve in the future, and this is one of the most exciting (if not, the most exciting) untapped red wine-producing region in the world today. Picture what it must have been like running around tasting Barolo and Barbaresco in the 1950s, or Côte-Rôtie and Hermitage in the same timeframe, and that is what it is like tasting in Ribeira Sacra today. Continuing to recover vineyards where nature has encroached, planting terraces that were never replanted after phylloxera, fine-tuning (and resisting modernist tendencies in the cellars like routine use of extraction enzymes) in winemaking and embracing and discovering the potential longevity of the red wines of Ribeira Sacra are all on the agenda for the coming decades, and we are at the very start of a re-birth of a world class wine-producing region at the present time. I hope the collective winegrowers of the Ribeira Sacra will take Burgundy as their guiding lights in terms of potential styles here, as the stunningly complex minerality that the red wines here can exhibit, if winemaking in the cellar does not overlay too heavy of a signature, is the stuff that future legends are made from and very much merits being front and center in the aromatic and flavor profiles of the wines. In a great, great many cases, this is already the case, though there are some experiments with raising certain cuvées in *Barricas* and wines with new wood are more and more common in this region these days. Not that the reds of Ribeira Sacra marry poorly to new wood, but the danger is that too much oak will obscure the very special signatures of *terroir* that is inherent in these steep-pitched terraces, and which cannot be emulated anywhere else in the world of wine!

While there are several red and white wine grape varieties that excel in the slate and granitic soils of Ribeira Sacra, the region’s current reputation and much of its future notoriety will likely rest on the quality of Mencía, which is the workhorse red wine grape of this isolated corner of Galicia. I should take a moment to discuss a bit the characteristics and style of top flight examples of Mencía, as it is a grape that was nearly unknown outside of Galicia before the first stirrings of a wine renaissance began to be felt here in Ribeira Sacra in the late 1990s. In my experience, which is growing by leaps and bounds, but is hardly extensive at this point, Mencía

is quite similar to Pinot Noir in several important characteristics, though it is hardly a twin brother of Burgundy's beloved red wine grape. In terms of weight structural elements- i.e. how tannins and acidity are doled out across the chassis of the finished wine- Mencía (particularly as it is grown in Ribeira Sacra) is quite similar to Pinot Noir, and I find that it is also a variety that is very much reflective of its underlying *terroir* and again, it shares this similarity with Pinot. Mencía is also the predominant red wine grape in the neighboring D.O. of Bierzo to the east of Ribeira Sacra, but here the deeper and richer soils tend to show more of a Cabernet Franc structural profile in the wines produced from the Mencía grape, rather than the more Pinot-like attributes found in Ribeira Sacra. Due to its excellent ability to translate transparency from the vineyard into the finished wine, it is also a grape that is fairly sensitive to oak influence, and if new wood is to be used with Mencía, it is best doled out with not too generous hand. However, aromatically and within its spectrum of flavors, Mencía is very different from Pinot Noir, and it really shares its aromatic and flavor profile with other red wine grapes of France far more than it does with Pinot. For starters, at least when Mencía is young, it is most often a very black fruity wine, with notes of cassis, dark berries and pomegranate in predominance, though it does tend to get more red fruity with extended aging. It also shares some aromas and flavors with both Mourvèdre and Syrah in my experience, as it can offer up notes of tree bark and smoke, as well as be peppery and slightly medicinal in its youth (very much like Syrah). Mencía can also offer a wide and very intriguing set of savory elements, which remind me very strongly of the botanicals one finds in Italian red such as the beautiful Montepulciano of Emidio Pepe.

In any event, this was my first visit to the region and I am still very much a novice when it comes to the wines of Ribeira Sacra, but I tend to remedy that situation as quickly as possible. On this trip, I had an opportunity to taste a few older reds from the region, which was one of my goals before I set out from New York, and based on a superb showing of a red from the Amandi sub-region from the 1995 vintage, twenty years down the road is still early days for well-balanced reds from Ribeira Sacra, and it seems more than likely that at least forty years of positive evolution in the bottle is not out of the question for the best wines being produced in the region today. When one looks around the other wine-producing regions of Spain at the present time, it is pretty clear that only Rioja has the same potential for this kind of longevity for a significant percentage of its wines (I leave out Goyo Garcia's brilliant wines from Ribera del Duero for the moment, as he seems to be a single beacon of light in the long, dark night that has afflicted this region of Spain since the combination of global warming and the foolish "Mediterranean Wine" mentality became so pervasive in the non-critical Spanish wine circles in the last fifteen years), and if a generation down the road, Ribeira Sacra and Rioja are spoken of with the same reverential tones, then we will know that today's winegrowing pioneers in Ribeira Sacra will have done their jobs very, very well. In the meantime, there are some mighty interesting things stirring in the steep hillsides and twisted canyons of Ribeira Sacra, and if you are a wine lover interested in getting in on the ground floor in a region that looks poised to soar in quality in the decades to come, now is the time to start fully exploring the lovely wines of Ribeira Sacra.

Adega Algueira (Doade)

The Adega Algueira is owned by Fernando González and his family, who founded the estate in 1998. Señor González had been a vineyard owner in the region for far longer, having tended the family's eleven hectares of vines for three decades before deciding to take the plunge

and produce his own wines. The vineyards are all located in the Amandi sub-region of Ribeira Sacra, overlooking the steepest canyons on the Sil River, and the estate farms Mencía, Albarello, Merenzao (local name for the Trousseau grape), Caiño and Garnacha (which is called Tintorera in the region) for its red wines, and Godello, Treixadura, Albariño and Loureiro for its white wines. Since opening, the adega has worked with the top Ribeira Sacra consulting winemaker, Raul Perez, and all of their vineyards are now farmed under biodynamique principals (though not yet officially certified as such). This is one of the crown jewel estates in Ribeira Sacra, as Algueira continues to hand-harvest all of their parcels, use foot-trodding to crush their grapes (rather than destemming), ferments solely with indigenous yeasts and is very discreet in the amount of new wood that they utilize. The winery produces several different bottlings, with many of them highlighting less popular grapes from the region, such as a single varietal bottling of Merenzao, Albarello and Garnacha. Additionally, they have several distinct cuvées of Mencía, which are raised under different methodologies in the cellar, to create a lovely hierarchy of bottlings from this fine variety. The winery's white wines are fine complements to their red wine portfolio, with equal care taken to the vinification of each wine and their whites are clearly also some of the finest in the region. In addition to producing some of Ribeira Sacra's finest wines from their small winery looking down on the Sil River, up above the vineyards, the González family also has an excellent restaurant right at the winery, called O Castelo, which is open seven days a week and a great place to explore the fine lineup of Algueira wines with the excellent regional cuisine. On the day of my visit, it just happened to be Fernando González's birthday, so after a very deep tasting, we were treated to a superb late lunch at the winery's restaurant with the entire Algueira team. My only regret was that I still had several more appointments that afternoon and could not fully avail myself of the excellent wines, though I had no trouble dining to the utmost of pleasure! I should note that I tasted a couple more wines during my visit here, such as the superb 2011 Momento Bueno de la Vida Branco, but I have left out the notes here for any wines that I reviewed in Issue 51.

White Wines

2013 Ortezada- Adega Algueira

The Ortezada bottling from Algueira is comprised of a blend of forty percent each of Godello, Treixadura and twenty percent Albariño, with the wine fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks. This is quite a pleasant wine for early quaffing, offering up a bright bouquet of tangerine, spring flowers, salty soil tones and a bit of lime peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and still quite primary in personality, with good balance, a sound core of fruit and perfectly respectable length and grip on the finish. It is still young and more complexity may emerge with bottle age, in which case, my score will seem stingy. 2014-2025. **87+**.

2012 Escalada (Godello)- Adega Algueira

I really liked the 2011 Escalada from Algueira when I tasted it here in New York in June, but the 2012 was very grumpy at the time of my visit to the adega and I fear that I simply caught it at an awkward time. The winery owns old vines of Godello, ranging from thirty to eighty years of age, but the 2012 seemed to be still quite dominated from its *battonage* during the *elevage* of the wine, and was not showing the same precision and stony soil tones of the previous vintage. Today, the wine offers up a straightforward nose of pear, a touch of fresh pineapple, acacia blossom, a touch of leesiness and some buttery oak (despite being raised in eight to ten year-old barrels). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with good acids (this

bottling does not undergo malo) and good length on the fruit-driven and laid back finish. The 2011 Escalada seemed to have far more grip on the backend, and tons more soil tones, but it may just be early days for the 2012 version. ???

Red Wines

2013 Mencía - Adega Algueira (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2013 regular bottling of Mencía from Adega Algueira is a superb example of the vintage, coming in at a touch lower octane than the 2012 and 2011 versions (12.5 versus 13 percent) and is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. The vines used for this bottling average twenty to forty years of age. This is really a superb wine and one of the top values to be had from Ribeira Sacra, as the wine offers up a complex and vibrant nose of pomegranate, black cherries, slate, a touch of black pepper, tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and nicely transparent, with lovely soil signature, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, very well-balanced and classy finish. Fine juice. 2014-2030+. **90.**

2012 Mencía - Adega Algueira (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2012 Algueira “regular” Mencía is outstanding, as I noted in my note on the wine tasted here in New York in August, and this particular bottle was quite consistent. The bouquet is a complex and quite vibrant blend of dark berries, pomegranate, a touch of youthful medicinal tones that recall Cornas, woodsmoke, tree bark, fresh herb tones and a complex base of slate-derived minerality. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, young and nascently complex, with an excellent core, very good soil signature and a long, ripely tannic finish that closes with lovely grip and balance. I would be inclined to give this wine at least a couple more years in the cellar to fully blossom- it should prove to be quite a long-lived vintage for this “basic” bottling. 2016-2035+. **92.**

2011 Mencía - Adega Algueira (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2011 Mencía from Adega Algueira is from one of the top recent vintages in the region, and it shows! The wine is the same octane level as the 2012 version, coming in at an even thirteen percent, but the wine is deeper and sappier on both the nose and palate than its younger sibling. The outstanding bouquet is a blend of black cherries, sappy notes of pomegranate, coffee bean, woodsmoke, pepper, tree bark and a topnote of graphite. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and quite sappy at the core, with excellent focus and grip, ripe tannins and impeccable balance on the long and complex finish. Give this outstanding vintage of Algueira’s Mencía at least another four or five years in the cellar, for though it is already a very good drink, there are still a myriad of layers of complexity here still to unfold! 2018-2040+. **93+.**

2009 Mencía “Carravel” - Adega Algueira (Ribeira Sacra)

The Carravel bottling of Mencía from Algueira includes twenty percent whole clusters and spends one year of its *elevage* in eight to ten year-old barrels, with a small percentage of the blend undergoing its malolactic fermentation in barrel as well. The 2009 Carravel offers up a ripe and complex bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, some youthful medicinal tones, a touch of tree bark, smoke, slate and just a touch of vanillin oak (despite the use of all older barrels). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine, sappy core of fruit, fine focus and balance and lovely grip on the long and ripely tannic finish. This is a fine bottle of Mencía that needs another five or six years in the cellar to really blossom and start to drink with some of the complexity of maturity. Fine juice. 2020-2050. **92+.**

2006 Mencía “Carravel” - Adega Algueira (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2006 Carravel is a touch less ripe than the 2009 version, coming in at an even thirteen percent alcohol, and the wine is outstanding. The superb aromatic constellation jumps from the glass in a blend of pomegranate, black cherries, slate, woodsmoke, a touch of cumin, smoked peppers and a gentle base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and complexity, a superb signature of soil, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. There is a bit of oakiness here, but the wood is very well done and simply adds to the complexity of the wood. But, the fact that the wine is raised in eight to ten year-old barrels and still shows a bit of oak influence indicates just how transparent Mencía is as a grape, and the use of new wood clearly would have spoiled this excellent wine. 2014-2035+. **94.**



2012 Mencía “Pizara” - Adega Algueira (Ribeira Sacra)

The Pizara bottling from Señor González and his team is their old vine cuvée of Mencía, with the average age of the vines in this bottling eighty years of age. The wine is produced entirely with whole clusters, foot-trodden and undergoes an extended period of maceration that lasts forty-five to sixty days. The wine is raised entirely in older, six hundred liter barrels. The 2012 Pizara comes in at an even thirteen percent alcohol and is an excellent, young wine, wafting

from the glass in a blend of black cherries, pomegranate, slate, a hint of syrah-like medicinal tones, graphite, lavender and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and displays excellent mid-palate depth, with excellent balance, fine-grained, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This needs four or five years of bottle age to really blossom, but it is going to be a terrific bottle of Mencía in the fullness of time and should prove to be quite long-lived. 2018-2040+. **93+**.

2010 Mencía “Pizara” - Adega Algueira (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2010 vintage of Pizara from Algueira is another excellent wine, and with a few more years' worth of bottle age than the 2012, it is starting to really blossom and show some of its secondary layers of complexity on the nose, though it remains still in need of a bit more cellaring for the palate to follow suit. The excellent nose delivers a pure and complex mélange of black cherries, pomegranate, incipient notes of smoked peppers, coffee bean, a beautiful base of slate, woodsmoke, a bit of that medicinal overtone and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a sappy core, outstanding focus and grip, ripe tannins and a very long, refined and still fairly youthful finish. This is clearly a superb year in the Amandi section on the Sil, and the 2010 Pizara is going to be a reference point wine in the years to come for the superb potential of today's Ribeira Sacra. 2019-2040+. **95**.

2005 Mencía “Pizara” - Adega Algueira (Ribeira Sacra) Served from Magnum

Man, I wish I knew then what I know now, as it would be very civilized to have a case of magnums of the 2005 Pizara resting comfortably in the cellar! This is another absolutely stellar bottle of wine which is just now starting to reach its plateau of maturity and is drinking with great style and complexity. The bouquet is a superb mix of dark berries, graphite, chipotles, woodsmoke, a lovely base of slate, eucalyptus and just a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and pure, with lovely focus and balance, a good core, just a bit of remaining tannin and lovely intensity of flavor on the long and complex finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Mencía that is beginning to hit on all cylinders, but which will last for decades still in magnum. Out of mag, I would still try to hold off a bit longer before really drinking this wine with wild abandon- not because it is not already delicious- but, it is going to have a very long life in this format and it would be a pity to drink too much of the wine now and not see it when it reaches its thirtieth or fortieth birthday! Out of regular-sized bottle (which I have not tried) it is probably fully ready to drink, but magnums deserve a bit more patience. 2018-2050. **94**.

2012 Merenzao - Adega Algueira (Ribeira Sacra)

As I mentioned above, Merenzao is the local name for Trousseau (or Bastardo to fans of Madeira), and this is a grape that was once more widely planted in Ribeira Sacra. It is likely that several of the old vineyards planted to field blends scattered around the terraces include a fair bit of Merenzao in them. Algueira has old vines of Merenzao, as this bottling is produced from eighty year-old vines. This cuvée is aged twelve months in old barrels and then twelve months further in bottle prior to release, so the 2012 is just hitting the market now. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet of cherries, red berries, coffee, a great base of soil, a touch of bonfire and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very transparent, with a fine core of fruit, suave tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. Very impressive juice. 2019-2040. **93+**.

2011 Merenzao - Adega Algueira (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2011 Merenzao from Algueira is another excellent wine, and in this vintage, one can sense a bit of the Jura-like associations for this varietal. The excellent nose jumps from the glass

in a mix of red berries, orange peel, cherries, venison, a touch of anise, coffee and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite youthfully structured, with a fine core, a fair bit of tannin to resolve and lovely focus and grip on the long, classy and very well-balanced finish. This will be excellent with some bottle age. 2020-2040+.

93.

2009 Merenzao - Adega Algueira (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2009 Merenzao from Adega Algueira is another very good wine, but it is a touch more rustic in personality than its counterparts from the 2011 or 2012 vintages. The bouquet offers up a complex blend of raspberries, cherries, charred wood, orange peel, game, fresh herbs and coffee. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and quite tangy in personality, with a good core of fruit, a bit of backend, rather coarse tannin still looking for resolution, and good length and grip on the slightly rustic finish. Good juice, but not in the same league as the younger examples. 2016-2030. **89+**.

2009 Albarello - Adega Algueira (Ribeira Sacra)

The Albarello grape (also known as Brancellao) is no longer “suggested” as a recognized grape for the D.O. of Ribeira Sacra, but according to Fernando González, in pre-phylloxera times, this was the most widely planted grape in the entire region. The team at Algueira has decided to try and keep this near extinct grape alive, and the 2009 was the first vintage where they produced a bottling of Albarello. The inaugural release is quite good, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol, but showing lovely transparency on both the nose and palate, with a bouquet of baked cherries, woodsmoke, coffee, *sous bois*, nutty tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite soil-driven in personality, with a good core, little tannin and good length and grip on the already quite autumnal finish. This is ready to drink and will not make old bones, but it has developed lovely secondary complexity already and will be a good drink for the remainder of its life in bottle. 2014-2024. **90.**

2012 Madieleva (Tintorera or Garnacha) - Adega Algueira (Ribeira Sacra)

Adega Algueira first began bottling their Garnacha, or Tintorera bottling in the 2007 vintage, and this is a very good wine that is quite true to its varietal character and would have been a good edition to Robert Parker’s expensive Grenache tasting held in Rioja a few years back. The wine is produced in the classic style of the estate, with indigenous yeasts, foot trodding and raised in old barrels. The 2012 Madieleva is still a very young and peppery wine in need of bottle age, offering up a youthful and complex nose of red and black raspberries, hung game, lovely soil tones, early signs of *garrigue* and plenty of ground pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very primary, with a good core, fine focus and balance and a long, chewy finish. This needs time to blossom, but based on how well the 2007 is drinking today, this will be a good bottle with some time in the cellar. 2020-2040. **90.**

2010 Madieleva (Tintorera or Garnacha) - Adega Algueira (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2010 vintage of Madieleva purports to be 13.5 percent octane, but tastes a touch riper than that to my palate, as there is a bit of uncovered backend heat on the finish. The wine is more elegant on the nose than the 2007, offering up notes of black cherries, rasp berries, roasted meats, bonfire, lovely soil tones and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely focused, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the fairly heady finish. This is just a bit too hot on the backend for my palate, but it is well-made and those

with more of a tolerance for high alcohol might find my score a little stingy, as the complexity here is quite good. 2014-2020+? **87.**

2007 Madieleva (Tintorera or Garnacha) - Adega Algueira (Ribeira Sacra)

The inaugural vintage for the Madieleva bottling from Algueira is quite good and at age seven is now into its plateau of maturity. The wine is ripe and ready on both the nose and palate, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black raspberries, pepper, coffee, hung game and plenty of upper register spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a ripe and satisfying personality, melting tannins and a long, buxom finish. This is a very good bottle of Grenache for drinking over the next decade or so, and though it purports to have the same octane level as the 2010 rendition (13.5 percent), it seems to be a tad lower in alcohol and likely to age just a bit longer as a result. 2014-2025. **89.**

Don Bernardino (Monforte de Lemos)

Don Bernardino is the wine label for restaurateur, Emilio Rodríguez Díaz, whose excellent O Grelo restaurant is located in the lovely old town of Monforte de Lemos, which dates back to medieval times. The restaurant is located just down the hill from the Castillo de Monforte and the lovely Parador hotel that crown the summit of the town. As I noted above, Monforte de Lemos is effectively the capital of the Ribeira Sacra region and O Grelo may very well be the culinary capital of Monforte. Señor Rodríguez has terraced vineyards for his red wine which lie in the sub-region of Amandi, in the heart of the Ribeira Sacra, towering over the Sil River. He tends his vines with care- when his duties as Monforte de Lemos' top restaurateur allow him time in the vines, and I have always been very impressed with the high quality of his bottlings of Mencía that I have tasted, which emphatically do not taste like a sidelight! We tasted his 2013 and 2012 editions at O Grelo with several other small growers from the Amandi sub-region of Ribeira Sacra.

2013 Don Bernardino Mencía (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2013 vintage of Don Bernardino Mencía is an excellent wine, coming in at an even thirteen percent alcohol and offering up classic depth and complexity. This wine is still on the young side and starts out life a touch black fruit-driven, but with time in decanter, it blossoms beautifully, with a more red fruity character emerging and outstanding transparency. With sufficient air, the wine offers up a superb bouquet of red and dark berries, black cherries, tree bark, a nice touch of botanicals, a strong base of slate soil tones, woodsmoke and a bit of graphite in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core, fine focus and balance and very good length and grip on the ripely tannic finish. High class juice, once again, from Señor Rodríguez Díaz! 2018-2035+. **92+.**

2012 Don Bernardino Mencía (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2012 Don Bernardino Mencía is another excellent bottle in the making, and though it is quite approachable today, I would be strongly inclined to give it another three or four years' worth of bottle age and allow it to fully blossom. The excellent and very pure nose jumps from the glass in a mix of pomegranate, graphite, black cherries, slate, cigar ash, a touch of chicory and a superb signature of slate soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with outstanding mid-palate intensity, ripe tannins and exquisite focus and grip on the very long and perfectly balanced finish. This is very tasty today, but the best is yet to come, so be patient! 2017-2040. **93+.**

Décima- José Manuel Rodríguez (Vilacha)

José Manuel Rodríguez is the head of the growers' association and regulatory agency of Ribeira Sacra, and as head of the D.O., his position as one of the top quality-oriented and traditionalist producers cannot be understated. His vines are based in the sub-region of Amandi, which has long been considered one of the very finest areas in all of the Ribeira Sacra region, and his very, very steep terraced vineyards really underscore how special is the terroir in this section of Ribeira Sacra. José Manuel Rodríguez strikes me as a very thoughtful and educated gentleman, with a strong sense of history and Ribeira Sacra's place in it over the long centuries since Roman times, and I cannot think of a better man to be leading the growers' association. It does not hurt that his wines are also outstanding, albeit produced in very small quantities. His vineyards are planted to ninety percent Mencía and ten percent Tintorera (Garnacha). He is now producing two distinct cuvées, a tank-raised bottling of Mencía and one raised in Barricas, which is raised in a combination of 225 and 300 liter barrels that were three years-old when the 2012 version was raised in them. I have consistently loved his wines since I first tasted the 2010 bottling of his straight Mencía, and his 2013 is a stellar success in what was a more difficult vintage in Ribeira Sacra.



José Manuel Rodríguez, standing at the top of one of his vineyards in the Amandi section, overlooking the Sil.

2013 Décima Mencia- José Manuel Rodríguez (Ribeira Sacra)

What I really respect about José Manuel Rodríguez's 2013 regular bottling is that he has not sought to impose himself on the vintage in any manner, and the wine is a simply gorgeous reflection of a slightly lighter year in Ribeira Sacra. The wine is quite a pale ruby in color, but loaded with nuance on both the nose and palate, as it jumps from the glass in a beautifully high-toned bouquet of red cherries, pomegranate, slate, lead pencil, a touch of cherry skin and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and delivers plenty of depth at the core, with outstanding transparency, tangy acids, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the vibrant and complex finish. A beautiful middleweight in the making, all this wine needs is a few years of bottle age to allow its secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. 2017-2035+. **93.**

2011 Décima Mencia "Barrica"- José Manuel Rodríguez (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2011 Décima Mencia "Barrica" had only been bottled two months before my visit in early October of this year, so it may not have fully recovered from the *mise* at the time that I was tasting it. The wine lacks just a bit of brightness at the present time, which may be a function of the recent bottling, or the result of the *elevage* in cask. In any case, the bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of cranberries, pomegranate, lovely botanicals, graphite and a bit of lead pencil from the *barricas*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, moderate, well-measured tannins and excellent length and grip on the still quite primary finish. I had loved the 2011 regular bottling from Décima, so it seems more than likely that I have just caught this cuvée at an awkward period after the *mise*, and have scored the wine within a range. If it brightens up again after it gets a bit more distance from the bottling, it will place at the upper end of the range. 2016-2035+. **89-93+.**

Divina Clementia (Sober)

Divina Clementia is the very, very new project of Raul Suarez, whose family have been winegrowers in Ribeira Sacra for generations, but Señor Suarez has just taken the plunge to begin producing wines commercially on a small scale, utilizing their oldest vines and finest terroir in Amandi for their own bottling. And this was indeed started on a small scale, as the first vintage of 2012 has only produced a single barrel of their Mencia, or three hundred bottles. Happy with the first year's results, Señor Suarez and his team, headed by winemaker Pedro Pérez, (who also makes the wines at Adegas Guimaro), have expanded production up to three barrels in the 2013 vintage. Raul Suarez very kindly dropped off a bottle of the 2012 at the restaurant, O Grelo in Monforte de Lemos, so that I could try the wine during my visit to the region, as my itinerary was already too full to add a visit to the bodega.

2012 Divina Clementia Mencia (Ribeira Sacra)

The inaugural vintage of Divina Clementia is comprised of a blend of eighty-five percent Mencia and fifteen percent Tintorera (Garnacha) and was raised in a new French barrel for six months, as this was the first year for the wine. The grapes hail from two small vineyards, with the average age of the vines between sixty and eighty years-old. The 2012 is an outstanding first vintage, but I found the wine just a touch oaky in personality and look forward to tasting the 2013 and future vintages, when the percentage of new wood will be a bit less. The bouquet is a blend of pomegranate, tree bark, cigar ash, a touch of menthol, lead pencil and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit youthfully tarry in personality, with a good core of sappy fruit, fine complexity, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced and chewy finish.

The wine seems to lack just a touch of brightness from its six month stay in a new barrel, but the constituent components here are very good indeed and the future looks quite bright for Divina Clementia. 2017-2027+. **88+**.

Peña das Donas (Pombeiro- Ribeiras do Miño)

I did not visit the bodega, Peña das Donas, owned by partners Antonio Lombardía and Jesus Vázquez Rodríguez (who oversees the vineyards), but I had the chance to try their lovely 2013 Godello bottling of Almalarga. From what I could glean from this one bottle, the Almalarga seems destined to be a fairly long-lived example of Godello and the 2013 was just a puppy, with the real fireworks of complexity here currently a bit buttoned up behind its fine structural attributes. I would love to drink it again in five years' time! It is my distinct impression that Godello has as fine a potential for aging as any dry white wine produced in Spain these days, but it tends to be a bit more reticent out of the blocks than a wine such as Albariño, so patience is very much rewarded if one can take a top example like the Almalarga bottling from Peña das Donas and tuck it away in a cool corner of the cellar for a handful of years before having at it in earnest.

2013 Almalarga Godello- Peña das Donas (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2013 Almalarga from Peña das Donas is a very fine young bottle of Godello, offering up a very primary bouquet of tart pear, a touch of beeswax, green olive, salty soil tones and an exotic topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a fine core, brisk acids and a very long, stony and soil-driven finish. This wine really deserves some bottle age to fully blossom and show all it has to offer. Fine potential. 2016-2025+. **91+**.

Bodega Sabatellus- Primitivo Lareu (Sabadelle)

Primitivo Lareu's marvelous Bodega Sabatellus winery is based high above the Miño River, in the village of Sabadelle, with its terraced vineyards hung precipitously on the slopes looking down towards the water. His family's vineyards are in the westernmost stretch of the Chantada sub-region, just before those of Ribeiras do Miño commence, and though the canyons and precipitous hillsides here do not tower over the river with the same elevated grandeur as in the Amandi section on the Sil River, this is still very prime real estate for vineyards in Ribeira Sacra and some of the most brilliant wines of the region come from this stretch of terraced vineyards. Primitivo's vineyards tend to primarily lie mid-slope above the river, on a mix of granite and slate. Chantada is probably the coolest section of Ribeira Sacra, and Primitivo turned his back on his first love of painting and sculpture to focus his creative energies on winegrowing above the Miño River more than a decade ago, returning to his family's winery and vineyards and firmly establishing the small bodega in the minds of quality-conscious clients in the Galician market. The family already had several plots of fifty-plus year-old vines, and as Señor Lareu became more established, he has purchased several abandoned terraces in prime terroirs to reclaim, saving some plots of old, neglected vines and clearing and replanting others of these old vineyards that had lain fallow. As he likes to say, "look back to go forward, as it is good to recover traditional forms and techniques, because in the end, you will have better results than with more conventional, industrial methods." Of course, in the steep-pitched slopes of Ribeira Sacra, traditional methods are mostly all that is available- at least for the vineyard work! And viticulture is Primitivo's passion, as he comments that "working in the vines has

never seemed like work to me, and I very much enjoy doing everything I can to have the healthiest vineyards possible and the best grapes possible to work with- after that, everything else is easy.” Today Señor Lareu produces four wines, which include his white wine made from a blend of Godello and Treixadura, a regular bottling of Mencía and 1500 bottles of a “Barrica” cuvée of Mencía that spends six months in two, three and four wine barrels, after undergoing both alcoholic and malolactic fermentations in tank. His fourth bottling is called Ouvenza, which is comprised of a blend of Mencía, Garnacha and Brancellao, which I have never had the pleasure to taste, as almost the entire production each year goes to a single restaurateur in Galicia.

2013 Sabatellus Branco- Primitivo Lareu (Ribeira Sacra)

Primitivo Lareu’s white wine is made of a blend of sixty percent Godello and forty percent Treixadura, which seems to be a preferred *cépages* for many of the top white wines in the region, and the wine is barrel-fermented. The 2013 is pretty ripe at 13.5 percent and offers up a very pretty nose of white peach, coriander, stony soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite soil-driven in personality, with a nice core, bright acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2014-2019. **88.**

2013 Sabatellus Mencía- Primitivo Lareu (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2013 Sabatellus Mencía regular cuvée is outstanding, tipping the scales at a cool 12.5 percent and offering up lovely transparency and nascent complexity on both the nose and palate. The fine bouquet is a blend of dark berries, pomegranate, black pepper, slate, woodsmoke, fine botanicals and a bit of graphite in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and soil-driven, with a fine core, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. I would tuck this wine away in the cellar for at least the next three or four years and really let it blossom. 2017-2035+. **92+.**

2013 Sabatellus “Barrica” Mencía- Primitivo Lareu (Ribeira Sacra)

The Sabatellus Barrica bottling from 2013 is a touch riper than the regular cuvée, coming in at thirteen percent octane, and the wine is quite promising as well. The nose jumps from the glass in a blend of black cherries, a touch of tree bark, dark soil tones, cassis, graphite and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with fine concentration in the mid-palate, moderate tannins and very good focus and grip on the long finish. The wine seems a touch rounder on the attack from its sojourn in older barrels, but perhaps a bit less defined by its minerality. That said, both Sabatellus bottlings are outstanding examples of the vintage. 2018-2035. **92+.**

2012 Sabatellus Mencía- Primitivo Lareu (Ribeira Sacra)

Primitivo Lareu’s 2012 Mencía regular bottling is lovely, but at this early stage, it looks like the 2013 version may edge this one out in the long haul. The octane is the same as the 2013 bottling, at 12.5 percent, and the bouquet is a fine and youthful blend of pomegranate, a touch of cranberry, slate, tree bark, botanicals and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, nascently complex and just starting to blossom a bit, with a good core, fine focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, bouncy and still quite primary finish. This is a lovely wine that still wants another year or two in the cellar to really start to drink with generosity. 2015-2030+. **90+.**

2011 Sabatellus Mencía- Primitivo Lareu (Ribeira Sacra)

The Mencía from Sabatellus is outstanding and perfectly captures all of the potential inherent in the 2011 vintage in Ribeira Sacra, which is a bit stronger than both 2013 and 2012. The excellent nose is still a bit reductive and takes some urging to wake up from hibernation, but

with some swirling, blossoms to offer a youthful blend of dark berries, cassis, espresso, slate, tree bark, graphite and a nice topnote of cigar wrapper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly primary, but with complexity certain to come with further bottle age. The wine has a great core of pure fruit, seamless balance, moderate tannins and excellent grip on the very long and focused finish. This is very high class juice in the making. 2018-2040+. **94.**

2010 Sabatellius “Barrica” Mencía- Primitivo Lareu (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2010 vintage of Sabatellius Barrica Mencía is a bit more new oaky in profile than the fine 2013 version, but this was the first vintage, and the barrels were that much newer as a result. The wine is still very well done, as it offers up a nice, stylish and new oaky nose of cassis, dark berries, pepper, slate, tree bark and plenty of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep,. Full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with fine complexity and focus, very good grip, but with just a bit of backend oak tannins sticking out on the long finish. One has to start somewhere, and it is not possible to make a Barrica bottling without barrels, but the 2010 is just a touch compromised by its wood and not in the league with the 2013, and presumably, subsequent vintages, as the barrels will continue to get older and more subtle in their impact on the profile of the wine. That said, this is still a good bottle of wine- just not up to the level of the other bottlings I tasted during my visit to the winery in Sabadelle. 2014-2025. **89.**



Roberto Regal and his lovely girlfriend (far left), with the Sabatellius crew (the brothers Lareu center) and friends.

Toalde- Roberto Regal (Ribeira Sacra)

Roberto Regal is consulting winemaker and vineyard manager for a number of small properties in the Miño River valley, as well as owning several of his own parcels of vines and making a small quantity of his own wines, which he bottles under the Toalde label. He comes from a pioneering winemaking family on the Miño, as his grandmother, was the very first vigneron in Ribeira Sacra to convert her vineyards over to organic viticulture and this formidable woman is still very much active in running her own small estate and tending her own vines at age seventy-six! In fact, on a late Sunday afternoon, when we stopped by after a large tasting with Roberto to say hello and taste his grandmother's new releases, she was just coming in from having spent the afternoon tending her terraced vines. As Roberto is the guiding force behind several micro-estates on the Miño, we tasted several new releases from his various clients who he makes wines for in the region, and I have grouped all of these wines together in this section, for ease of finding them and for their strong familial resemblance. What I find most remarkable about Roberto Regal's wines is that each one that he produces has its own unique voice and style, which no doubt is a reflection of the underlying terroir of each vineyard he works with for his various clients on the Miño, and which is in notable contrast to a consulting winemaker such as Michel Rolland, who seems to manage to make every wine he gets his hands on taste exactly the same, no matter the terroir, region or cépages! I have listed Roberto's own label, Toalde first, and then listed his clients wines that we tasted at the same time, in alphabetical order following my notes on the Toalde. I have listed Roberto's name under the title of each wine, though I suspect that this does not appear on any of the bottles for his clients, which just bear the name of the adega or owner. Roberto Regal is a young man from a very strong winemaking family background, and it seems to me that he is destined to be one of the famous stars of Ribeira Sacra for a long time to come.

Tinto

2013 Toalde Mencía- Roberto Regal (Ribeira Sacra)

Roberto Regal's production under his own label is very small, as he owns only about one hectare of Mencía vines here in a very steep section overlooking the Miño River, with his vines scattered amongst several small plots. His 2013 Toalde is truly excellent, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, graphite, woodsmoke, espresso, slate and the first stirrings of the forest floor that will emerge with some bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very primary in personality, with a sappy core of fruit, ripe tannins and great length and grip on the youthfully complex and very, very promising finish. A superb example of the vintage. 2018-2040. **94.**

2013 Adartia Mencía- Roberto Regal (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2013 Adartia Mencía is a very nice example of the vintage, with just a bit more of a fruit-driven personality out of the blocks than several of the other bottlings produced by Roberto Regal, but good juice nonetheless. There are three thousand bottles of Adartia Mencía produced in each vintage. The bouquet is a fine constellation of dark berries, a touch of chicory, woodsmoke, gamebirds, tree bark and a nice base of soil tones- though without the customary slate and graphite tones of many examples of Ribeira Sacra. On the palate the wine is bright, pure and fullish, with nice complexity, modest tannins and good length and grip on the wide open and succulent finish. Good juice that will develop its secondary layers of complexity with a couple of years in the cellar. If the wine shows more transparency with bottle age, my score will seem unduly conservative. 2016-2030. **89+.**

2012 Adartia Mencía- Roberto Regal (Ribeira Sacra)

I did not note the octane level on the 2013 Adartia, but the 2012 comes in at an even thirteen percent and is a bit riper than its younger sibling. The nose is excellent, wafting from the glass in a mix of cassis, dark berries, woodsmoke, a nice touch of grilled meat, new leather and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely sense of plushness on the attack, a fine core, a nice base of fine-grained tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. Lovely wine. 2014-2030+. **91.**

2011 Adartia Mencía- Roberto Regal (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2011 vintage of Adartia Mencía is outstanding, and my favorite of the three vintages we tasted of this bottling. The bouquet is deep and vibrant, delivering a fine constellation of cassis, sweet dark berries, tree bark, graphite, botanicals, a touch of bonfire and a lovely base of slate. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and really starting to blossom on the palate, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent soil signature, moderate tannins and lovely complexity on the very long, pure and perfectly balanced finish. High class! 2014-2035. **93+.**

2013 Araña Mencía- Roberto Regal (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2013 Araña Mencía is made in tiny quantities, as Roberto only made three hundred bottles of this wine from a small parcel owned by one of his clients. I am not sure if it is commercially available, as it seems three hundred bottles could be a year's supply for personal consumption, but in any event, here is the note. The wine is 12.2 percent alcohol in 2013, included fifteen percent whole clusters and was fermented entirely with indigenous yeasts. The bouquet is superb, wafting from the glass in a mélange of cassis, black cherries, coffee bean, graphite, a touch of pepper and a lovely botanical topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a superb core of fruit, moderate tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long and primary finish. This will be excellent. 2018-2035+. **93+.**

2013 Diego de Lemos Mencía- Roberto Regal (Ribeira Sacra)

The Diego de Lemos winery is owned by Esther Teixeira Lemos and her sons, who cultivate five hectares of terraced vineyards in the village of Pincelo, in the Chantada sub-region of Ribeira Sacra. Their vineyards are certified organic. Chantada's terraced vineyards are on granite, rather than slate, and this gives the Diego de Lemos bottling more of a spine of stony minerality, rather than the graphite of the slate hillsides closer to the confluence of the Miño and Sil Rivers. The 2013 version is outstanding, offering up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, pomegranate, lovely botanicals, stony minerality, a bit of charred wood, tree bark and a lovely topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a soil-driven personality, a fine core of fruit, modest tannins and good length and bounce on the complex and very classy finish. A lovely bottle that I would opt for cellaring for four or five more years and really let it come into its own. 2018-2035+. **92+.**

2013 Fiume Mencía- Roberto Regal (Ribeira Sacra)

Though I am sure that Roberto told me about the vineyard background of this bottling, I did not write it down. In any event, the wine is excellent, showing pretty good ripeness for the vintage at 12.8 percent alcohol and offering up an excellent nose of dark berries, cassis, tree bark, pepper, slate and a lovely topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely classic in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. The 2013 Fiume Mencía will age very well indeed, but it is already quite tasty out of the blocks and it is going to be a challenge to keep one's hands off of this bottle in the cellar. 2014-2035. **92+.**

2013 Nomad Mencía- Roberto Regal (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2013 Nomad Mencía is raised in a percentage of new oak barrels (though naturally, I did not write down what percentage!), which gives the wine a nice sense of roundness on the attack right out of the blocks, but which might take away just a bit of the backend bounce that I so much like in top flight Mencía. The bouquet is a lovely blend of dark berries, espresso, tree bark, dark soil tones and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite sappy at the core, with fine focus and grip, well-measured tannins and very good length and grip on the still quite primary finish. It will be interesting to follow this wine and see how the oak weaves itself into the tapestry of complexity of this wine with extended bottle age. 2017-2035+. **91+**.

2013 Ora et Labora Mencía (Lot L-01)- Roberto Regal (Ribeira Sacra)

If memory serves me correctly, this wine comes from three small Miño vineyards owned by a priest who has asked Roberto to tend the vines and make the wines for him, hence the name Ora et Labora, which translates as “Pray and Work”. Two of the vineyards are located right down by the river, and the third is located way up at the top of the slope, so that the resulting wine offers noteworthy complexity from its two variations of soil and exposition. The 2013 came in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a very pure and refined bouquet of cherries, pepper, pomegranate, lead pencil, a touch of meatiness, espresso, smoky overtones and a superb signature of slate soils. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and very soil-driven, with fine intensity of flavor, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and tangy finish. Fine, fine juice. 2014-2035. **93**.

2013 Adega Sidroh Tinto- Roberto Regal (Lugo)

This wine hails from a lost vineyard that has just been reclaimed of very old vines not far outside of the city of Lugo, which is about fifty kilometers north of Monforte de Lemos and beyond the official boundaries of Ribeira Sacra. The owner of the vineyard is Paco Sanromán, and the field blend in his vineyard is approximately seventy percent Garnacha Atlantico (also known as Tinto Sarrodo) and thirty percent Merenzao (Trousseau). The 2013 is a fine bottle, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, cassis, graphite, game, coffee bean, tree bark and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite tangy in personality, with a fine core, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the focused finish. This is quite tasty right out of the blocks, but seems to have the balance to age well for at least a decade, and maybe longer. 2014-2024+? **90**.

Branco**2013 Diego de Lemos Branco- Roberto Regal (Ribeira Sacra)**

The 2013 Diego de Lemos Branco is made up of a blend of sixty percent Godello and forty percent Treixadura and is a very pretty wine, but is not as focused or complex as their red wine. The bouquet is a stylish mix of tart pear, bread fruit, beeswax and a nice base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and a bit leesy in personality, with good length and grip, sound acids and nice balance on the backend. Good, honest juice. 2014-2020. **87**.

2012 Noa de Lareu Branco- Roberto Regal (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2012 Noa de Lareu Branco is comprised of a blend of sixty percent Godello and forty percent Treixadura and was barrel-fermented. The wine is quite lovely, offering up a juicy nose of peach, pear, almond paste, honeysuckle and nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, sound acids and fine length and grip on the wide open finish. Good juice. 2014-2017. **88**.

Viña Cazoga- Jorge Carnero (Amandi)

Viña Cazoga has a long history of fine wine production in the Ribeira Sacra and was once upon a time, one of the largest and most important estates in the area, but during the nadir of the region's fortunes- which really started at the dawn of the twentieth century, when so many of these steep vineyard sites were abandoned and young people emigrated en masse in search of more profitable work- Jorge Carnero's family's vineyard holdings in the region of Amandi dwindled down to almost nothing. Jorge's grandfather, Raimundo Vidal, had inherited the region's largest winery from his own father, but as the family bought fruit in from neighbors as well as using their own vines, their access to high quality fruit began to dwindle in the very unprofitable wines times in the early twentieth century in Amandi. The vineyard holdings of many of the families in the area that the Carnero family would buy grapes from began to be split up amongst a myriad of cousins through inheritance (some of whom decided to just make wine for personal consumption and some just let the vineyards go fallow), and as the region's vinous fortunes sank, so did the volume of the Carnero family winery. Jorge's father, Diego Carnero Vidal was instrumental in starting to resurrect the Ribeira Sacra region in the 1970s and today, due to his efforts, the family owns a single, 3.9 hectare parcel of vines right above the Sil River's waterline that was historically recognized as the finest vineyards in Ribeira Sacra. At this lower altitude, down by the river, the vines are a bit more sheltered and mature perfectly year after year. Sixty percent of the nearly four hectare vineyard is planted with vines in excess of one hundred years of age, with ninety-five percent of the vines planted to Mencía and the balance made up of a mix of Tempranillo and Merenzao. Diego Carnero Vidal undertook the resurrection of the old family winery in the late '70s and early '80s, and during the ongoing construction, he outfitted a very large old barrel that was there with a door, wiring, a bed and a television, so that there was somewhere to sleep "out of the elements" when the roof and walls were being redone. This led to the local legend of the "Crazy Cazoga" (cazoga is Galician dialect for a ram, and hence why the winery is now known as Viña Cazoga) "who slept in a barrel and buried all his money out in the vineyards", as neighbors could not see any potential at that time of trying to make a commercial go of winegrowing on those steep slopes in Amandi. Viña Cazoga was one of the first and most important wineries to join the fledgling D.O. of Ribeira Sacra in the mid-1990s.

Jorge took over the family bodega at a relatively young age, as his father passed away suddenly and unexpectedly, and Jorge was thrust into the management of the winery early on in his career. He now produces two wines from their great vineyard parcel, a regular bottling of Mencía that is aged in stainless steel tanks and an old vine, reserve wine that he has named in memory of his father, called Don Diego. The Don Diego bottling, which was first produced in the 2001 vintage, is sourced entirely from centenarian vines and spends six months of its elevage in used, five hundred liter Limousin oak barrels prior to bottling and is released after further bottle age of at least a year or two, depending on the style and structure of the vintage in question. Even using older barrels and very old vines, the Mencía grape still shows a bit of wood influence in this wine, which does make for a markedly different impression than the stainless steel-aged regular bottling, but the wood is always done in the most discreet manner possible and the two wines are outstanding examples of their respective genres. These days, Jorge Carnero produces three barrels of Don Diego each year, which are currently three, four and five years of age respectively (at least when the 2012 was racked off into them for aging). As I noted above, the Don Diego bottling spends six months in its older barrels, before being returned to

tank for further aging prior to bottling, to ensure that it is never too marked by the wood, even though the barrels are not new. What an enlightened approach to oak! The soils are not all slate in this sheltered vineyard in Amandi, as right down close to the waterline, the slate gives way to granite, so that there is a very strong vein of minerality in both Viña Cazoga bottlings of Mencía. Jorge Carnero is one of the sweetest and most self-effacing winegrowers in all of Ribeira Sacra, and I am not really sure if he truly knows just how spectacular his wines are, but he is quite clearly one of the stars in the region. He very generously offered to open a few older bottles the morning following our dinner with other growers at O Grelo in Monforte, but apologized in advance that “Mencía from the decade of the 1990s was going to be a very old wine and probably no good to drink!” We chuckled, anticipating something a wee bit more vibrant at that age, and the following day, I think the light was beginning to go on for Señor Carnero regarding the aging capability of his wines, as his 1995 Mencía was absolutely stellar!



Jorge Carnero (left), with his consulting oenologist, in the tasting room at Viña Cazoga.

2013 Viña Cazoga Mencía- Jorge Carnero (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2013 Viña Cazoga Mencía is an outstanding example of the vintage, but the wine is very tightly-knit at the present time and really needs some time in the cellar to start to unfold. The closed and promising bouquet is a youthful mix of dark berries, black cherries, pepper, botanicals, a bit of tariness, an absolutely stellar base of slatey minerality and a distinctly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off outstanding concentration at the core, with ripe, well-integrated tannins, great acids and superb length and grip on focused and still very primary finish. Today, this young wine closes with notes of pepper and a bit of *herbacité*, but the potential is clearly here and all this wine needs is time in the cellar. However, given how closed it was at the time of my visit, I have scored it within a range, just to be fair, but would expect it to eventually blossom and peg to the high end of the range. 2020-2040+. **91-94.**

2012 Viña Cazoga “Don Diego” Mencía- Jorge Carnero (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2012 Don Diego was sitting in tank at the time of my visit, having spent its six months in barrel and now harmonizing with a bit of further *elevage* prior to bottling. The wine is quite ripe for a 2012, coming in at 13.5 percent, but its balance and clarity are impeccable and this is going to be an outstanding wine. The bouquet is a ripe and complex blend of dried black currants, graphite, slate, espresso, a touch of fruitcake, just a whisper of cedar and an overtly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chewy, with a very, very primary personality today, a fine core, ripe tannins and excellent focus and balance on the long, structured finish. This is very, very early days for the 2012 Don Diego, and my score may eventually prove to be rather stingy. 2020-2050. **93+.**

2011 Viña Cazoga “Don Diego” Mencía- Jorge Carnero (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2011 Don Diego, which we tasted the evening before at O Grelo, offers up a very deep and potentially complex bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, espresso, graphite, menthol, superb minerality and a smorgasbord of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and absolutely rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, great focus and balance, nascent complexity and stunning length and grip on the very pure and structured finish. 2011 was an excellent year in Ribeira Sacra and the 2011 Don Diego is going to be a legendary effort from this fine vintage! 2020-2055+. **96.**

2002 Viña Cazoga “Don Diego” Mencía- Jorge Carnero (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2002 Don Diego is a brilliant bottle of Ribeira Sacra, and at age twelve it is just into its apogee of peak drinkability and offers up superb depth and complexity on both the nose and palate. The outstanding bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine constellation of black cherries, cassis, graphite, smoked peppers, slate, smoky overtones and a bit of coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very pure and vibrant, with a sappy core of fruit, a lovely signature of soil, still a bit of tannin adding spine and a very long, perfectly balanced finish of excellent focus and grip. This is a simply stellar bottle of old vine Mencía, with the oak no longer showing even a touch of influence in the wine. This is still very early days for the stunning wine, and another couple of decades from now, we may be revisiting its expected period of decline, as it could still be cruising along with great style and vigor! 2014-2035+. **95+.**

2001 Viña Cazoga “Don Diego” Mencía- Jorge Carnero (Ribeira Sacra)

The 2001 vintage of Don Diego, being the very first that Jorge Carnero produced, was raised in new, five hundred liter barrels, and consequently, it is a bit more advanced along its evolutionary arc than its 2002 vintage counterpart. The absolutely *à point* nose is spectacular, soaring from the glass in a blaze of sweet dark berries, smoked meats, espresso, lovely spice tones primarily redolent of cumin, woodsmoke, coffee grounds, graphite and chipotle peppers.

On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, very, very pure, with an excellent core of fruit, superb soil signature, impeccable balance, tangy acids, melting tannins and magical length and grip on the focused and beautifully complex finish. A great, great wine. 2014-2030+. **96.**

1995 Viña Cazoga Mencía- Jorge Carnero (Ribeira Sacra)

The 1995 regular bottling of Viña Cazoga Mencía is drinking beautifully as it closes in on its twentieth birthday and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon! The pure and very classy bouquet offers up a very complex mélange of dried dark berries, pomegranate, intense notes of both graphite and slate, cigar ash, dried eucalyptus, a touch of juniper berry, violets and a lovely note of forest floor. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very, very transparent, with a good core, just a whisper of remaining tannin, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and impressively complex finish. This is a beautiful middleweight at its zenith. 2014-2025+. **93.**

Valdeorras

Valdeorras is one of the smallest D.O.s in Galicia, tucked in on the southeastern edge of Ribeira Sacra and to the southwest of Bierzo (which lies outside of the province of Galicia in neighboring Castilla y León, but is generally grouped with the D.O.s of Galicia). Valdeorras these days is first and foremost, Godello country, and some of the very finest examples of this outstanding white wine varietal are produced in Valdeorras. The reds of Valdeorras can also be outstanding, with Mencía important here, but a host of other indigenous grapes, such as Merenzao, Brancellao and Sousón (to name only a few) are also widely planted and red wine blends are very typical in Valdeorras. This is a rugged region of rolling hills, through which the Sil River continues to flow from its origins in the Cantabrian Mountains of southern Bierzo out towards its meeting with the Miño River near Ourense and then on to the Atlantic, more than two hundred kilometers to the west. The best vineyards in Valdeorras run along the Sil River valley, and tend to be richer than those in the river canyons to the west in Ribeira Sacra. Valdeorras takes its name from the same ancient gold mining of the Romans, as the centurions were encamped here for two centuries as well mining for the mineral resources of the region and the name means “Valley of Gold”, reflecting just how successful the Romans were here two millenniums ago. One can find some outrageously fine values amongst the top producers of Valdeorras.

Adegas D’Berna (Valdeorras)

Adegas D’Berna is the winery of the young couple, Berna Guitián and his wife, Elena Blanco. They have a nice, mid-sized modern winery that is tucked into a rolling hillside, surrounded with vines, in the village of Córghomo in central Valdeorras. Córghomo is north of the Sil River valley and one of the cities of Valdeorras, O Barco. Berna Guitián is a fourth generation vigneron in this region, as his great grandfather planted the first family vines in Córghomo back at the turn of the last century and winegrowing has been passed down from father to son since those days, but Berna is the first generation to take the plunge and move from pure viticulture to also producing and selling his own wines in bottle. Today, Berna and his wife Elena produce primarily single varietal bottlings of both Godello and Mencía, primarily raised in stainless steel tanks, though the couple has recently added to their lineup a Mencía bottling aged in Barricas, which they first produced in the 2011 vintage. In addition to their standard and really fine bottling of Godello, they now offer a bottling that spends an extended period of time on its fine lees, with systematic battonage, and to my palate, it is not the equal of their excellent

regular bottling. The couple works with one of the very finest consulting oenologists in the region, José Luis Murcia, who is often cited as “the man who knows more about Godello than anyone in Valdeorras.” These are very good wines that offer excellent value.

2013 D’Berna Godello- Adegas D’Berna (Valdeorras)

The 2013 Godello from Berna Guitián is a very fine example of this excellent varietal. The wine offers up a youthful bouquet of pear, white peach, coriander, salty soil tones, lime peel and a nice touch of acacia blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with a fine core, bright acids and very good length and grip on the focused finish. This is certainly tasty today, but like most serious examples of Godello, a year or two in the bottle will really let this wine blossom. 2014-2020+. **89+**.

2011 D’Berna Godello- Adegas D’Berna (Valdeorras)

The 2011 Godello from Berna Guitián was covered over the summer, and the wine showed consistently excellent during my visit to the winery. Here is the note from this June: The couple’s 2011 Godello is a superb follow-up to the 2010 I last tried, as the wine offers up a superb nose of lime, green apple, sea salts, a nice touch of grassiness, a complex base of soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, excellent focus and grip and a long, vibrant and classy finish. I love good Godello, and this is a stellar example! 2014-2017. **92**.

2011 D’Berna Godello “Sobre Lias”- Adegas D’Berna (Valdeorras)

The Sobre Lias bottling is the adega’s extended lees aging example of Godello, and it is the one wine that the family produces that leaves me a bit less than excited. The wine spends ten months on the lees, with the *battonage* decreasing over time, but fairly frequent at the outset. To my palate, the 2011 lost both focus and complexity over the course of its stay on the lees and it does not hold a candle to the precise, complex and exciting regular bottling from this vintage. The bouquet is a mix of white peach, stony minerality, gentle leesiness and musky floral tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chunky, with a good core and sound acids, but little delineation remaining. This is okay, but the raw materials were outstanding, so this is hardly adding anything by staying on the lees and seeing a lot of *battonage*. 2014-2020. **86**.

2013 Mencía D’Berna - Adegas D’Berna (Valdeorras)

The 2013 Mencía from Adegas D’Berna is a lovely example of this varietal, offering up a deep, pure and youthful aromatic constellation of dark berries, pomegranate, tree bark, graphite and a nice base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus, moderate tannins and a very long, poised and primary finish. This is certainly approachable today, but I would be inclined to give it at least a year or two in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. A great value! 2014-2025+. **92**.

2012 Mencía “Barrica” D’Berna - Adegas D’Berna (Valdeorras)

The 2012 vintage was only the second bottling to be raised in oak by the adega, with the barrels now into their second year. The wine shares the quite discreet use of wood with the first vintage of 2011, and though it is still quite young, its promise is self-evident. The wine is still resting in tank, after having been racked only two weeks prior to my visit, and was to be bottled a month down the road. The fine bouquet delivers a youthful blend of cassis, dark berries, lead pencil, tree bark, slate, espresso and a nice framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and tightly-knit, with a fine core, moderate tannins and very good length and grip. This wine will excellent. 2017-2030. **92+**.

2011 Mencía “Barrica” D’Berna - Adegas D’Berna (Valdeorras)

The inaugural vintage of Barrica Mencía from Berna Guitián has turned out very well indeed, which was made in one hundred percent new, three hundred liter barrels (two French and one American oak), with the wine not spending too long in barrel before being returned to tank. The wine is very, very well done, with the oak influence quite moderate and nicely integrated into the body. The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a sappy blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, lead pencil, slate, woodsmoke, tree bark and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with excellent soil inflection, ripe tannins and a long, complex and modestly chewy finish. This needs a couple more years to fully blossom, but will be excellent when it reaches full maturity. 2016-2030. **93.**



Berna Guitián in his tasting and events room at the winery in Còrgomo.

Hacienda Ucediños- Bodega Eladio Santalla (Valdeorras)

Hacienda Ucediños is the main label of the brothers Santalla, who have recently taken over running their family bodega in Valdeorras. The brothers produce bottlings of one hundred percent Godello and Mencía from the family’s vineyards on the Valdeorras, Bierzo boundary. The “King of Godello”, José Luis Murcia also consults for the brothers. These are good wines at very fair prices. There is also now a Barrica bottling of Mencía produced by the Santalla family,

but the only example that I tasted was the inaugural vintage of 2010, and the bottle struck me as not representative, so I do not know how this compares with their other very good wines. I did not take notes on the age of vines of their Godello vineyards, but their Mencía vineyards average thirty to forty years of age (showing how long it took for parts of the region to recover from phylloxera!) and are planted on soils with a fairly high clay content, which gives the resulting wine a bit more mid-palate amplitude than wines made from this variety in the stonier soils of Ribeira Sacra. The couple of vintages of their Mencía that I tasted showed a wine that really looks like it would age gracefully, and though I know that the custom is to drink this wine fairly young in Spain, I would be strongly inclined to let the Santalla brothers' reds age for several years before drinking. Their Godello, not surprisingly, as José Luis Murcia has his hands in the production here, is a wine that clearly is built to age and is best after a handful of years in the cellar.

2013 Godello- Hacienda Ucediños

The 2013 Godello from Hacienda Ucediños is an excellent wine, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, honeysuckle, coriander seed, salty soil tones and a touch of *crème patissière* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and concentrated at the core, with very good acidity, fine focus and grip and a long, primary and well-balanced finish. This wine is quite easy to drink in its youth, but it is really still a puppy and a couple of years' worth of bottle age will pay handsome dividends. 2014-2025. **91+**.

2011 Godello- Hacienda Ucediños

2011 is an excellent vintage in Galicia and the Godello from the Santalla brothers is a fine, fine example of the potential that this growing season presented to winegrowers across the region. At age three, the wine is now fully blossomed and drinking with great style and personality, jumping from the glass in a fine *mélange* of white peach, salty minerality, white lilies, citrus peel and a nice touch of green olive. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very soil-driven in personality, with lovely mid-palate depth, bright acids and a long, complex and vibrant finish. A beautiful bottle of Godello now into its apogee, but with years of life still ahead of it. 2014-2025+. **92+**.

2010 Godello- Hacienda Ucediños

The 2010 Godello from Hacienda Ucediños is still on the young side, with a more tightly-knit personality than the fine 2011, and I would still be inclined to give this wine a couple more years in the cellar to relax a bit structurally. The youthful bouquet is a mix of grapefruit, pear, salty soil nuances, a touch of pastry cream and a lovely topnote of honeysuckle. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite snappy, with a fine core, very good soil signature and a long, crisp and still quite shut down finish. This is going to be very good, but give it a couple more years to more fully emerge out from behind its girdle of acidity. 2016-2025. **92**.

2013 Mencía- Hacienda Ucediños

The 2013 Mencía from Hacienda Ucediños tips the scales at an even thirteen percent alcohol and offers up lovely promise on both the nose and palate. The youthful and pure bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of cassis, pomegranate, espresso, cigar smoke, tree bark and a lovely base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a youthful personality, a fine core, moderate tannins and lovely focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. Fine juice, but give it time to develop its secondary layers of complexity! 2016-2030+. **91+**.

2011 Mencía- Hacienda Ucediños

I have a slight preference for the 2013 Mencía over its 2011 counterpart, as the younger vintage seems just a touch lighter on its feet, whereas the 2011 is a touch dense in style. My gut instinct is that this is emblematic of a further refinement in the winemaking here of the two young Santalla brothers as they gain experience. Not that the 2011 Mencía is bad by any stretch of the imagination, as it offers up good depth and youthful complexity, delivering a bouquet of dark berries, game, woodsmoke, a bit of tariness, dark soil tones and new leather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, closed and still quite chewy, with ripe tannins and a long, balanced and still quite reticent finish. This needs time, and I may well be underestimating it a bit, but it is in its dumb phase and not showing a whole lot today. 2018-2035+. **88+?**



A last farewell, for this October, to the beautiful and pastoral Miño River valley.

1985 CLARET THE FINEST BORDEAUX VINTAGE OF THE 1980s



Château Lafite-Rothschild, sitting up on its plateau, as seen across the lake on the estate.

The 1985 vintage in Bordeaux is one of the great classics of the latter half of the twentieth century, with its inherent elegance and perfume having been augmented over time with seemingly greater depth and intensity as the vintage has grown in the bottle with cellaring. The vintage was released as the Bordeaux market was really starting to heat up on both sides of the Atlantic, with the plush 1982s having ushered in what would become a golden age for claret, as the decade of the 1980s produced several outstanding vintages to follow-up on the success of the 1982s. I was in my early wine trade days when the 1982s were released, and though there were still plenty of top wines from this vintage still kicking around in the pipeline when I began to earn a decent salary and could start building my cellar, it was with subsequent vintages from this decade that I really began to lay away a proper quantity of claret for the long haul. Here in the US, the 1982s had been released as futures when the dollar was at an unnaturally high point against the French Franc, and the dollar's muscle had continued through the campaign for the 1983 futures, so that we in the American wine trade were absolutely rolling in fine claret at great prices from those two vintages. Bordeaux futures had never been such a big part of the wine trade in the states until those two vintages came along, and they served as a catalyst for

America's love affair with claret, which lasted at least through the end of the decade, and it was only the stiff uptick in prices with the 1995 vintage that forced a bit of a chill on the Bordeaux market here in the US. During that run, the only great vintage that really did not receive its proper credit was the 1985, which somehow fell a bit below the radar of the market makers at the time and was perceived as quite expensive for its relative quality out of the blocks.

I remember very well my first introduction to the 1985 Bordeaux vintage, as I was still too young in the trade to be making pilgrimages to the *En Primeur* tastings, so that I had to rely on professional reviewers for information on the wines prior to their arrival here in the US. In 1986, the American journalists were in general accord that the 1985 clarets did not warrant purchasing as futures, as the prices were a bit too high (seems almost Kafkaesque in today's Bordeaux pricing world to call the 1985s too expensive back in the day!) for the quality of the vintage. How wrong those predictions turned out to be! In any event, because the futures market here in the US was very tepid for the 1985s, I had the pleasure of attending a small, but quite complete trade tasting of the 1985s in Boston as soon as the wines had arrived in the states in the early spring of 1987, and I was immediately struck by how stunning the wines were right out of the blocks, with less plumpness than the 1982s, but even finer aromatic complexity and perfume, and still absolutely no shortage of mid-palate stuffing and very sophisticated structural elements. I was in love with the vintage from the moment I tasted it, and I could not understand why the wines had not had more of a following in American journalistic circles during their abortive futures campaign here in the US. In any case, as my job at the time was as a buyer for a large retailer, I promptly loaded up on the vintage and had a great run selling these beautifully refined and utterly classic clarets over the next six months, with wines like '85 Lynch Bages selling for \$22, '85 Pichon Lalande \$27 a bottle and First Growths like '85 Lafite, Haut-Brion and Mouton all of \$60 a bottle. Hard to call those prices too expensive!

Over the following years, the 1985 Bordeaux vintage was always accorded a bit more respect once the wines had found their way into the pipeline than they had as futures, but with the decade of the 1980s finding more very good vintages such as 1986, 1989 and 1990 coming along on the heels of the '85s, the vintage still suffered a bit in the shadow of some of these other years. It was a great time to be cellaring claret, as there was a true smorgasbord of options from all of these vintages, not to mention the remaining 1982s and 1983s that were still fairly plentiful, so that I seemed to go home every week with a box of claret for the cellar and a bit less of my paycheck than I anticipated. Sadly, I did not buy as many 1985s as I should have, focusing more on the 1986s at that time, as well as backfilling 1982s when opportunity allowed, but despite a lack of focus on the 1985s, I managed to still put together a very good selection of the vintage in my blossoming cellar and looked forward to drinking these wines sometime down the road. The problem was, as anyone will know from starting to build a cellar, is that the question always becomes what to drink out of the cellar when one has only been amassing it for a few years and everything is still very young down there. The 1985 clarets never really closed down, as most other young vintages of Bordeaux routinely do, so that over the ensuing five or six years, I found myself frequently grabbing a bottle of 1985 Bordeaux out of my cellar when I had a hankering for a great bottle of wine, so that my collection of '85s started to be whittled down a bit, while my cache of '86s and other vintages from the decade continued to rest comfortably in the cellar. By the time the vintage had turned fifteen, I was down to only a small handful of bottles, as I had drunk the lion's share of my purchases from 1985 (albeit, with great pleasure)

and did not really have a lot of quantity from this vintage still aging. Such is the life of a thirsty young wine professional with an even younger cellar!

In any event, I continued to accord the vintage its proper due, but did not rank it higher than some of the more highly-acclaimed vintages of the decade of the 1980s, assuming that the 1982s, 1986s, 1989s and 1990s would all eventually overtake the '85s in qualitative terms, once they had sufficient bottle age. Fortunately, I had friends who had deeper cellars than I did in those days, so their supply of 1985s had not dwindled anywhere near as alarmingly as my own collection of the vintage, and we continued to share a great many bottles of 1985s as the ensuing years unfolded. And a funny thing started to happen to this vintage around its twentieth birthday—the wines started to exhibit significantly more mid-palate depth and density than they had in their youth, seemingly putting on weight with bottle age and showing more structure and grip at age twenty than they had at any time in their previous twenty years of life. The wines continued to revel in their aromatic sophistication and perfume, as they had since day one, but now, instead of silky middleweights on the palate, most 1985s were now showing superb depth of fruit and world class length and grip on the backend. Fan as I had been since the very early days of this vintage's commercial life, I had never expected the wines to transform in such a dramatic manner as they entered their third decade of existence, and it was with great wonder that I began to find this characteristic a very consistent part of the wine-savoring experience with nearly every single bottle of 1985 claret that I crossed paths with from 2005 forwards. My claret loving friends here in New York noticed the same phenomenon, and we continued to marvel at how this vintage was blossoming in a most unanticipated and exciting manner.

Fast forward another decade, and the wines are now closing in on their thirtieth birthdays and drinking with stunning grace and charm. Some of the other, more highly-touted vintages from the decade of the 1980s have not been able to quite keep pace with this magical vintage, as the 1982s as they have aged have not shown the same degree of precision and freshness as the '85s, with some of the wines getting a bit “roasted” in character and not offering the same degree of elegance and complexity as their 1985 counterparts. The 1986s have remained still very young, and it is still far too early to proclaim that they will not live up to their initial hype, but this is a vintage where it still requires a leap of faith for their eventual blossoming, as most of the wines remain still fairly tannic, despite having retained excellent purity and depth at the cores. The 1989s have aged very well indeed, as I discussed a couple of years ago when comparing and contrasting this vintage with the 1990s, which have not stood the test of time with anywhere near the same consistency of quality as the '89s, but there are only a very small handful of wines from the 1989 vintage (such as Haut-Brion) where I would rather have the 1989 over its counterpart from 1985 (and even with Haut-Brion, I am not sure which vintage I really would rather have in the cellar). In short, as this great decade of claret starts to come more fully into focus with the passing of time, it is pretty hard not to come to the conclusion that the 1985s are the finest wines from this great ten year run of vintages, as they offer up greater complexity and elegance than any other of these fine 1980s' vintages, while the weight that they have collectively put on with bottle age has allowed them to close the gap that vintages like 1982, 1986 and 1989 had apparently opened up from the '85s in those early years.

The 1985 growing season was founded in a very cold winter, with temperatures freezing in January and threatening some damage to the vineyards, but this ultimately proved to be less of

a factor than was initially feared. The spring was uneventful, with adequate rain providing good water reserves for the start of the year, which would prove quite useful in the very dry months of August and September. May and June were quite typical of a good year on the Gironde, with scattered showers at times and plenty of sunshine, but not tremendous heat in these formative months. Most likely, the great purity and perfume that defines this vintage owes a debt to the cooler temperatures of the months of May and June, not to mention August. July was the hottest month of the summer in Bordeaux in 1985, but again, with some scattered showers keeping maturation running smoothly in the vineyards. However, that was the last precipitation that the '85 crop would see until harvest, as August was extremely dry, but thankfully not too hot, so the grapes did not bake during the month. Hydric stress would start to become a factor towards the end of this month and on into September of 1985, as it remained bone dry, and temperatures began to soar and the harvest started at the end of September after a very dry and very sunny and warm month that saw maturity in the grapes climb very well, though not equally between the different grape varieties. Because of the two months of drought conditions in August and September, the gravelly, best-drained sites on the Left Bank experienced quite a bit more hydric stress than the deeper and more clay-rich soils found on the Right Bank, so merlot in 1985 tended to come in with absolutely perfect ripeness, while cabernet sauvignon was a bit more of a mixed bag, with some of the best-drained vineyards having used up all of their water reserves in the soil and the cabernet vines shutting down for at least a brief period of time towards the end of August or early in September.

The 1985 harvest commenced at the end of September on the Right Bank, with *vignerons* bringing in beautifully ripe, pure merlot, and the wines of Pomerol and St. Émilion were particularly strong in this vintage right from the start and have aged with great success. On the Left Bank, the cabernet sauvignon was not always ideally ripe at the end of September, and some estates with the most gravelly soil beds decided to wait a bit longer before picking, so that cabernet sauvignon tended to be picked over a longer period of time, with some properties not ending their harvest until the third or fourth week of October. Early on, there were reports of some underripe elements in the cabernets of those who picked a bit earlier, but this hardly seems to have been likely, given how suave and seductively balanced the Left Bank 1985s were right out of the blocks. Perhaps this was a reflection of stricter selection of cabernet at the top estates, but it seems more likely that early reports of underripe cabernet in '85 were simply exaggerated. The crop size was very large for the time (though not particularly massive in comparison to more recent vintages), and this too probably contributed to commentary in the early days of the vintage that the wines lacked concentration. As I noted at the outset, the 1985 clarets were received with fairly modest excitement here in the US, but the English wine trade was far, far more bullish on the vintage than were the Americans, as the British trade and press correctly lauded the vintage for its great elegance, balance and perfume right from the start, and it is quite clear nearly thirty years down the road that the British were spot on with their evaluation of the young 1985s.

Early on, descriptions of the 1985s and comparisons to previous vintages varied, depending on which side of the Atlantic one happened to reside upon. The British commentators and wine trade found the 1985s quite reminiscent of the 1953s, which was very high praise indeed, as the 1953 Bordeaux vintage (along with the 1961s), produced the most elegant and refined clarets of the post-war era. Here in the US, the comparisons were more along the lines of the 1970s or 1971s- two very good vintages that were a bit under-appreciated at the time here in

America (and which probably continue to be so down to this day), with the general consensus being that the 1985s were in the “good, but not great” camp, as they lacked the “massiveness” found in the 1982s. Out of the blocks, the top Pomerols were accorded the highest praise, with other communes being described as lovely, suave and aromatically enticing wines that lacked sufficient stuffing and structure for long-term cellaring, and it was frequently said in the States of the 1985s outside of Pomerol that they would make good, easy-going drinking over the first fifteen or twenty years of their lives, but would not make old bones. This, of course, turned out not to be the case, as the vintage put on weight with bottle age and has blossomed into an absolutely stellar vintage that deserves today to be ranked up with the very finest years of the post-war era in Bordeaux, alongside vintages such as 1945, 1953, 1959, 1970, 1961 and 1982, and today, I have little difficulty ranking the ‘85s as the finest vintage of the decade of the 1980s.



One of the things that makes the 1985s so appealing is that this was one of the last of the traditionally ripe vintages in Bordeaux, so that alcohol levels were quite low by today’s standards, but very much still in line with what was produced throughout the Gironde in the post-war era down through the 1985s. So, for example, the 1985 Poujeaux is 12.5 percent, the 1985 Carbonnieux only twelve, and the 1985 d’Issan comes in at a very fit 11.5 percent octane. In general, typical alcohol levels run between twelve and 12.5 percent for the 1985 vintage, and this

has assisted the wines in their very positive evolution in bottle. Part of the very positive evolution of the vintage with age had to do with the lower alcohol levels, due to the large size of the crop (which had to ripen over a fairly extended growing season to get all the bunches fully ripe), but for the most part, ripeness was realized prior to picking and it has given wines of lovely fragrance, purity of fruit and plump generosity, without aromatics and flavors associated with *sur maturité* or roasted qualities from torrid summer conditions. The 1985 vintage, in general terms, is a vintage of beautifully measured ripeness, which has given the wines their splendid complexity and elegance. The vintage is not particularly high in acidity, but there are several wines with great vibrancy from excellent acids, and these wines really show off the positive attributes of the vintage to full advantage. In fact, one of the dividing lines in 1985 between the very good wines and the absolutely great wines can be there acid levels, as those that are a bit lower in acid can be just a touch easy going on the palate and lack a bit of the grip and bounce of the very top wines of the vintage.

One should mention that there is an Achilles' Heel to the vintage as well, which is true for all of the vintages of the mid-1980s (from every wine region), and that is that this was the absolute nadir for the cork industry, so one hits an awful lot more corked bottles when tasting through the 1985s (or the 1986s for that matter) as one is accustomed to today. The very real steps forward in quality control that the cork industry has made in the last fifteen to twenty years were very much needed when they finally commenced, and it can be a pretty sobering trip back in time to work through a large number of 1985s today and see the incidence of corked wines far higher than is the reality today. Take for example this roster of corked bottles from just my last tasting of the 1985s for this report: Chasse Spleen, Sociando-Mallet, Pichon-Lalande and Figeac were all corked- out of two dozen wines. Happily, that incidence of corked wines does not happen today, but it is very much part of the historical legacy of that period in the wine world, and one does have to take this into account when searching out 1985s today.

The 1985 vintage, since its very earliest days has had a reputation of being strongest on the Right Bank, and particularly Pomerol, but this has not been my experience over the years and is certainly not the case today. The Pomerols of the vintage are indeed outstanding, but there are also an awful lot of outstanding bottles from St. Émilion and the Médoc as well, and the finest wines of the vintage can be found on both sides of the Gironde. I should note that in preparation for this report, the commune that stood out for the absolute consistency of brilliance for its wines was actually Graves, as each and every wine I tasted from this region was stunning, and it may well be that this was the most successful of all the communes for red wines in 1985. Even traditionally underachievers, like Carbonnieux, made a stellar wine in 1985 in the Graves, and the top wines, such as Haut-Brion, La Mission Haut-Brion, Pape Clément, Domaine de Chevalier and Haut-Bailly are magnificent, as these properties were at their historical peaks in the decade of the 1980s. Though it is not part of the scope of this article, 1985 is also an outstanding vintage for the white wines from the Graves, so this region clearly seems to be deserving of top ranking in this year.

One of the things that should be mentioned about the 1985 vintage that this was still the very early days of the overt manipulation of wines in the cellars in Bordeaux, so that a few of the wealthier estates were already starting to play around with some of the winemaking techniques that have come to plague so many wines in more recent years, but such techniques were hardly

widespread in 1985. While it was still too early for the twin consulting hydra of Michel Rolland and Stéphane Derenoncourt, and their boring, cookie cutter wines, there were already signs of experimentation going on in the cellars of certain estates and there are indeed some overt failures in this vintage from a few of the biggest names. To cite just one example, the wines of Château Margaux that I have tasted in recent times from the decade of the 1980s (most recently, 1983, 1985, 1989 and 1990) have all been disappointing, when viewed in the context of their respective vintages and the historical legacy of the *terroir* at Margaux, as the wines have aged at an alarmingly accelerated rate. From the hindsight of nearly thirty years out from the vintage, it seems pretty clear that the wine making philosophy in the cellars at this estate in 1985 (and these other vintages from the '80s) sought to pump up the wines and make them more appealing in their early years (and indeed, the Margaux and Pavillon Rouge '85 were stunningly seductive in the first blush of youth), but it seems this methodology has dramatically compromised the ability of the wines to age along what would be considered a normal evolutionary curve for a First Growth in a top vintage. The '85 Margaux and Pavillon Rouge, both of which I had loved in the first decade of their lives, were amongst the most disappointing, senile and collapsing wines of all of my tastings of the vintage, and I would not hesitate to dump both of these wines if one is unfortunate enough to have bottles still in the cellar. Similarly, Cos d'Estournel has aged quite poorly and today presents a wine that is ham-fisted, four-square from over-extraction and is one of the relative failures of the vintage (and this too was a wine that was absolutely beautiful in its youth). So, one does have to be a bit selective in 1985.

However, the flip side of this equation is that the 1985 vintage was also a period of time when a number of estates that are no longer with us today in their traditional guise were at the top of their games, so there are some spectacular '85s that are a bit below the market's radar today, as the domaines have either been dissolved or succumbed to the winemaking stupidities of the power consultants in the region in more recent times. The vintage has several absolutely brilliant stars that are no longer part of the traditionalist firmament in Bordeaux today, such as Magdelaine, l'Arrosée, Poujeaux, Leoville-Poyferré, Pape Clément, Domaine de Chevalier and Mouton-Rothschild, and all of these estates made stellar wines in 1985. In fact, 1985 may well be the very last, truly great wine made at Mouton, and it vies with the beautiful 1982 as the best recent vintage here since the 1966, as it towers above the more highly-touted, but far less classical 1986 Mouton (which may or may not ever truly blossom). And, of course, both Magdelaine and l'Arrosée have simply been erased from the map in recent times, with the former having been plowed into neighboring Bélair-Monange after the 2011 vintage and l'Arrosée having been purchased by the Dillon family to add some potential to their ill-fated, overtly modernist project of Château Quintus. Both wines are amongst the most beautiful example of the '85 vintage and their deaths are still to be mourned. So, in this regard, given the far greater number of traditionally-oriented star performers in '85, this is another very positive attribute of the vintage.

The following wines, for the most part, have been tasted over the course of 2014. There are a few exceptions, as I began to work on this feature back at the end of 2012, and I took part in a few tastings of the 1985 clarets at the end of that year and again in 2013, to try and get this project off the ground. However, it kept getting pushed back as other articles and tasting events came along, so it was not until this past October that I was finally able to organize another broad tasting of the vintage and accrue sufficient notes to finally get this article completed. As I hope

the notes below will convey, the 1985 vintage in Bordeaux is a truly superb vintage, which the British commentators knew right from the outset, and it must assuredly be ranked at the pinnacle of the decade when one has a chance to really take a look at where the top wines of the vintage are today, on the threshold of their thirtieth birthdays. Contrary to early reports that the vintage would be pleasant, but quickly maturing, the vast majority of the top wines today are either just into their plateaus of peak drinkability, or still a bit on the young side, and many will continue to improve in the coming two or three decades. The year still remains fairly underrated on the international market, and many of the finest wines can still be purchased for very good prices, which in many cases, are less expensive than their less interesting releases from the last half dozen vintages!

Haut Médoc and Moulis

1985 Château La Lagune

The 1985 Château La Lagune is a beautiful bottle of wine that has now reached its apogee of peak drinkability and offers up superb complexity and elegance. The refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of dark berries, cigar smoke, a complex base of La Lagune's dark soil tones, a touch of chipotle pepper and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and absolutely perfect in its balance, with excellent mid-palate depth, fine focus and grip, fleeting tannins and lovely length on the stylish and classy finish. This is a great, classic vintage for La Lagune that still has decades of life ahead of it. 2014-2040. **93.**

1985 Château Poujeaux

I adored Poujeaux back in the decade of the 1980s, when it was one of the greatest steals to be found on the Left Bank, and the 1985 showed beautifully at our big tasting of the vintage here in New York in October. The bouquet is deep, complex and utterly classic for this fine Moulis property, wafting from the glass in a mix of cassis, cigar ash, incipient notes of chipotle peppers, a touch of coffee and a topnote of graphite. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and beautifully tangy, with a fine core of fruit, melting tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the very long and vibrant finish. I really love the backend energy of this wine, which is now at its apogee, but which still has decades of life ahead of it. This was truly a wine back in the day, before Stéphane Derenoncourt was brought in (IMO) to screw up the proceedings. 2014-2035. **91.**

Ste. Estèphe

1985 Château Calon-Ségur

Calon-Ségur made a very nice example of the 1985 vintage, with the merlot component here giving the wine a very velvety texture as it closes in on its thirtieth birthday, but with a good structural spine and fine complexity to match. The very suave nose wafts from the glass in a blend of dark berries, black cherries, a touch of cranberry, cigar smoke, charred, dark soil tones, cigarette ash and a whisper of the chipotles to come with further aging. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and round, with a lovely core of fruit, melting tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, elegant and beautifully balanced finish. One of the sleepers of the vintage and quite ready to drink. 2014-2040. **92.**

1985 Château Cos d'Estournel

The 1985 Château Cos d'Estournel was an absolutely beautiful wine in its youth, and I owned a case of this wine for quite some time, based on how marvelous it appeared in the early days of the vintage. I eventually swapped out the wine to buy more grand cru Burgundy in the

decade of the 1990s, which turned out to be a very good thing, as it now seems that I was too inexperienced in the formative days of this wine to recognize a wine designed to seduce early. In any event, the wine has aged quite poorly, with the gorgeous fruit of its youth now long gone, but a sullen chassis of over-extraction still very much in evidence in this wine. The angular nose delivers scents of black cherries, tobacco leaf, a whisper of pomegranate, lead pencil, dark soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ham-fisted and fairly over-extracted, with a dense core, moderate backend tannins and a rather eviscerated finish. This is a powerful example of the vintage, but it seems to already be losing much of its fruit, and is likely to be sinewy and remain somewhat coarse forever. 2016-2030+? **87.**

Pauillac

1985 Château Lynch Bages (First Bottling?)

The good examples of 1985 Lynch Bages are beautiful bottles of wine. The deep and very complex nose offers up a very classy blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, lovely, gravelly soil tones, espresso and a delicate topnote of petroleum jelly. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil inflection, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the tangy and very finely focused finish. I have heard reports that there is some pretty wide bottle variation out there with different releases of the '85 Lynch, but I have never had anything but stellar examples of this lovely vintage of Lynch Bages (until my most recent bottle this past October, please see below). Perhaps I have just been lucky. 2014-2050. **93+.**

1985 Château Lynch Bages (Second Bottling?)

At our last tasting of the '85s in October of this year, we hit a really rather dense and uninteresting bottle of '85 Lynch (which was clearly not an issue of provenance), and one of the long-time claret collectors at the tasting recalled that there had been a second big release of the 1985 Lynch Bages from the estate, after the wine had won some award or other, and that in his opinion, the second release had never been up to the quality of the first release. Given how good the bottle above was a few months before, and how much less satisfying this bottle was in October, I have to believe that this gentleman's recollections are historically accurate. This second example is okay, but not a patch on the stylish and elegant rendition of '85 Lynch above, as it offers up scents of dark berries, espresso, cigar ash, raspberries, dark soil tones and plenty of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and shows solid mid-palate depth, with moderate tannins and a long, tangy, but fairly angular finish. This is not bad, but not great either. 2014-2035. **89.**

1985 Château Lafite-Rothschild

This was my last bottle of '85 Lafite out of the cellar, as I only bought three bottles when it was released and dearly wish I had bought more, as the wine is rather more expensive today than it was back in 1987! This is an utterly brilliant year for Lafite and one of my favorite wines of the vintage, as it offers up a deep and very complex nose of cassis, sweet dark berries, a touch of fresh coconut, beautifully complex, gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke, fresh herbs and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very refined, with a rock solid core of sappy fruit, stunning complexity, impeccable focus and balance, moderate tannins and a fairly powerful finish (particularly for Lafite from this era) that closes with great purity and grip. A brilliant synthesis of the vintage's plush and suave personality and the inimitable elegance of Lafite. 2012-2060. **96.**

1985 Château Mouton-Rothschild (served from magnum)

I know that I am in the minority, but at the present time, I much prefer the quality of the utterly classic 1985 Mouton to the highly regarded, but rather dense and recalcitrant 1986. There is a purity, complexity and classic profile to the 1985 Mouton that is yet to show itself in the much more powerfully constructed 1986, and which may never emerge from that much more extracted wine. Out of magnum, the 1985 Mouton is stunning and still a tad on the young side, soaring from the glass in a blaze of cassis, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, a touch of coffee, fresh herbs and a very stylish base of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins and outstanding length and grip on the very poised and classy finish. Out of magnum this is still a fairly young wine. 2018-2075. **94+**.

1985 Château Pichon-Baron

The 1985 vintage at Pichon-Baron was prior to the renaissance here, which really commenced with the '86 or '88, and the 1985 Baron is not a particularly good wine. The nose is not especially clean, as it offers up a dulled blend of black cherries, charred wood, a bit of insecticide, damp soil and lacquered oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, hollow at the core and quite dulled in fruit tone, with a simple, short and modestly tannic finish. This wine already has one foot in the grave. Avoid. 2014-2020. **78**.

St. Julien

1985 Château Beychevelle

In contrast to the 1986, the 1985 Beychevelle is still in its funky adolescent phase and is not showing a whole lot of charm at the present time, but the wine shows off enough nascent complexity and such impressive length and grip on the finish today that I have to believe that this wine will blossom beautifully with a bit more patience. The nose is still a tad disjointed, as it offers up scents of black cherries, bell pepper, nutskins, a touch of chipotle, iron-like soil tones, coffee, herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and a bit tempestuous on the attack, with a good core of fruit, very good acids for the vintage, moderate tannins and just a bit of rustiness on the backend that I strongly suspect will go away with further bottle age. Drinking this today is a waste of bottles, but tuck it away for another six or seven years and it should really be blossoming. I would be very surprised if it does not ultimately place at the very top end of the projected score, but it is so cantankerous at the present time that it seems imprudent not to score it within a range. 2018-2050+. **89-92+**.

1985 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou

I do not really know what to make of the 1985 Ducru-Beaucaillou, as the three times I tasted this wine in the last year, none of the bottles showed well. As one of our group at the October tasting noted, there are lots of reports that the TCA problem in the cellars here in the latter half of the 1980s may well have started with the 1985 vintage, whereas others around the table, thought this was not really an issue until the release of the 1986 Ducru. In any case, this last bottle was not spot on, and was either a poorly stored bottle, or a clear indication that the cellar issues were already a problem here in 1985, as the wine is a bit dulled on the nose, but still complex in its mélange of dark berries, espresso, dark soil tones, tobacco lead, cigar smoke and a touch of herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep and full-bodied, but quite deeply-pitched and lacking in vibrancy, with a good core, moderate tannins and still a very long, very soil-driven finish. The breed of the great *terroir* of Ducru is still very much in evidence

here, but either this bottle is not one hundred percent pristine, of 1985 is the first of the short spate of problem years at this property. 2019-2040. ???

1985 Château Gloria

Château Gloria, back in the days when Henri Martin was alive and still running the property, was always one of the most user-friendly wines out of the blocks and a very good value, though of course, not generally built for the long haul. I was happy to see how well the 1985 Gloria continues to drink, with its wide open personality still quite enjoyable and showing no signs of imminent decline. The wine offers up a pretty nose of red and black cherries, cigar ash, a nice touch of soil and a gentle topnote of crushed violets. On the palate the wine is fullish, plush and nicely balanced, with melted tannins, fine focus and a long, juicy and very pleasing finish. This is not the most complex glass of claret, but there is a lot still to like here and it should continue to be quite tasty for years to come. Good juice. 2014-2030. **88.**



Château Ducru-Beaucaillou, towering resplendently over its view of the Gironde.

1985 Château Gruaud-Larose

The 1985 Gruaud-Larose is decidedly more marked by brettanomyces than its stable mate of the time, Château Talbot. With the '85 Talbot, I can happily tolerate the bit of brett, but here in the Gruaud, it is decidedly more “horsey” and really detracts a bit from the enjoyment of the wine. The nose on the '85 Gruaud-Larose offers up scents of sweaty leather, roasted cassis, cigar ash, gravel, a touch of eucalyptus, smoke and petroleum jelly. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with rather low acids for the vintage, good mid-

palate depth and very good length and grip on the moderately tannic finish. The complexity, depth, length and grip here are very good here, but the brett has to keep my score down a bit, as I have a hard time imagining anything beyond a well-charred steak off the grill that would marry with this wine. (If a fairly high dose of brett does not bother you, add five points to this score.) 2012-2030. **86.**

1985 Château Lagrange

It had been a few years since I last saw a bottle of the 1985 Lagrange, and this most recent bottle at the château during the *En Primeur* tastings of the 2011s (in April of 2012) showed very well indeed. The very pretty and refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, black truffles, cigar smoke, a nice dollop of fresh herbs, gravelly soil tones and a touch of coffee bean in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very well-balanced, with good, but not great depth at the core, melting tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex and *à point* finish. This is showing a touch greater purity than it did when I reported on it for the Lagrange historical piece a few years ago and is a lovely example of the vintage. 2012-2035+. **91.**

1985 Château Leoville-Barton

At our October tasting, I was in the minority of the group regarding the '85 Barton, as others absolutely loved this wine, but I found it a bit too marked by its new wood to rate it any higher than very good. Certainly, the 1985 is far superior to what is being made here today, but I did not love this wine as strongly as so many other examples of the vintage. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite polished in its mélange of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones and plenty of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a quite elegant attack, a good core, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the well-balanced and focused finish. The percentage of new wood here is probably quite a bit lower in 1985 than it is at Barton in 2005 or 2010, but I suspect that the toast here was quite high on the barrels and this has given the oak component a slightly Opus One characteristic, which I find distracting. I much prefer the classic 1983 Barton for instance, over this still very well-made, but more modern 1985 version. 2014-2040. **89.**

1985 Château Leoville-Poyferré

I loved the style of the old, soil-driven and classic vintages of Leoville-Poyferré, of which the 1985 is certainly one. The wine offers up a deep, complex and very classy bouquet of black cherries, tobacco leaf, really lovely and complex soil tones, just a faint touch of eucalyptus, smoke and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very transparent, with a great core of fruit, still a fair bit of tannin to resolve and outstanding focus and complexity on the very long and classy finish. This lovely '85 towers above the slickly modern, pumped up and new oaky renditions that the estate is currently turning out from this great patch of dirt! 2015-2040+. **92.**

1985 Château Talbot

The 1985 Talbot is faintly marked by brettanomyces, and for those who find this characteristic more objectionable than I do, this may be a wine that they may wish to avoid. But, for those who can tolerate a bit of brett, there is a lot to like here as well in its complex bouquet of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, lovely, gravelly soil tones and a touch of residual bell pepper still in residence in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, suave and beautifully balanced, with a very good core, fine focus, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the classy finish. Good juice for those of us who can tolerate a bit of brett. 2013-2040+. **91.**

Margaux

1985 Château d'Issan

I cannot recall having ever tasted the 1985 d'Issan previously, but the wine turned out to be one of the great positive surprises of our October tasting. This is one of the lowest octane wines of the vintage, coming in at 11.5 percent alcohol, but it has turned out to be a lovely and very stylish middleweight of very impressive complexity and breed. The wine wafts from the glass in a classy blend of cassis, dark berries, singed tobacco, dark soil tones, a touch of clam shell and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, low fat and very complex, with a good core, fine focus and balance, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the classic finish. This wine is fully into its apogee of peak drinkability, but will continue to cruise along for many decades to come. A lovely wine of the old school. 2014-2040. **90+**.

1985 Pavillon Rouge de Château Margaux

Based on the showings of this and the *grand vin*, Paul Pontallier certainly seems to have “missed” in this vintage. The '85 Pavillon Rouge is already in the midst of dying, as it offers up a muddled and imploded nose of dried berries, charred earth, coffee grounds, a bit of bug spray and damp soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite dulled, with no signs of overt oxidation, melted tannins and no focus or grip on the DOA finish. I might have entertained the possibility that this bottle was not pristine, but the bottle of 1985 Margaux, whose provenance was impeccable, was essentially the same wine at the same sad stage of devolution. 2014-2020. **65.**

1985 Château Margaux

The 1985 Château Margaux, which was so beautiful and elegant in its youth, has collapsed on itself and is now a wine already in pretty serious decline. The wine is amazingly dulled in aroma and flavors, as it offers up a tiring nose of desiccated cherries and plums, damp soil, cookie dough and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely flat as a pancake and lifeless, but with still a bit of tannin remaining. The wine shows no focus or shape and a short, blurry finish of a wine in descent into the next world. I reiterate that the provenance on this bottle was absolutely impeccable, and it looked pristine on the outside, with an excellent fill level, no signs of mishandling and had been in a friend's perfect cellar since soon after release. One can only assume that winemaking decisions were taken here that made the wine all upfront appeal and which have completely compromised its ability to age. Given how stunning other First Growths are in 1985, such as Lafite, Mouton and Haut-Brion, this is pretty inexcusable. 2014-2020. **70.**

1985 Château Rauzan-Ségla

In my mind, both the 1983 and 1985 vintages of Rauzan-Ségla are both quite underrated, as it is common wisdom (at least here in the states) that the renaissance at the estate commenced here with the 1986 vintage. This most recent bottle of the 1985 was absolutely stellar, offering up a complex and very beautifully perfumed nose of red and black raspberries, a touch of grilled meat, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of dusty stoniness, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with excellent complexity, a fine core of pure fruit, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly focused and very classy finish. A beautiful '85. 2013-2035+. **93+**.

Graves

1985 Château Carbonnieux

Who knew? The 1985 Carbonnieux is an absolutely superb example of the vintage and has to be one of the great, great sleepers out there in the world of mature claret. The outstanding nose jumps from the glass in a complex mélange of black cherries, red plums, nutskin, gravelly soil tones, a touch of cocoa and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, superb intensity of flavor, melting tannins and superb length and grip on the velvety and very classy finish. This is another of the low octane 1985s, tipping the scales at twelve percent, but it is an utterly complete and very satisfying glass of claret today, and still with plenty of life in it. Great juice! 2014-2030+. **91.**

1985 Domaine de Chevalier

It has been several years since I last saw a bottle of the 1985 DDC, but when last tasted in 2007, it was showing outstanding potential. The deep, pure and beautifully refined nose wafts from the glass in a blend of red plums, cherries, tobacco leaf, black truffles, cocoa powder, beautifully complex soil tones and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a fine core of sappy fruit, modest tannins, sound acids and outstanding length and grip on the really intense finish. This is a beautiful vintage of DDC that was just entering its plateau of peak maturity in 2007 and should continue to drink well for many decades to come. 2007-2040+. **93.**

1985 Château Haut-Bailly

The decade of the 1980s was a remarkable stretch for Château Haut-Bailly and the 1985 is another outstanding wine from this stunning string of wines. The superb and very perfumed nose offers up an expressive blend of black cherries, red plums, menthol, a touch of citrus, cigar ash, a lovely base of gravelly soil tones, black truffles and a bit of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly suave on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, perfect focus and balance and a very long, complex and softly tannic finish. Like so many of the 1985s, this wine has put on weight over the last decade and really shows some depth and stuffing today! The '85 Haut-Bailly is now at its apogee, but is so beautifully balanced that it should have no trouble keeping and drinking superbly well for several decades to come. 2014-2035+. **93+.**

1985 Château Haut-Brion

The 1985 Château Haut-Brion is a brilliant wine. Like the '85 La Mission, this wine is still a bit primary and in need of further bottle age to fully blossom, but all of the constituent components are here and this wine will be legendary in the fullness of time. The gorgeous nose delivers a fine constellation of black cherries, cassis, black truffles, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a bit of Haut-Brion's medicinal tones of adolescence, a dollop of fresh herbs and a deft base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and impeccably balanced, with a rock solid core, fairly low acids, fine-grained tannins and stunning length and grip on the voluptuous and utterly refined finish. A great, great Haut-Brion. 2018-2075. **96.**

1985 Château La Mission Haut-Brion

The 1985 vintage of La Mission is simply stellar, and though the wine is still on the youthful side, it has enormous potential. The bouquet on this excellent wine is still a tad primary, but offers up great purity and nascent complexity in its mix of cassis, sweet dark berries, a touch of menthol, dark soil tones, cigar smoke, a deft touch of new wood and a bit of upper register mintiness, that defines La Mission in 1985. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows stunning depth at the core, with beautiful balance and focus, modest tannins and great length and grip on the impeccable finish. This will be an extremely velvety and seductive vintage of La

Mission at its apogee, but it is still a bit on the young side for primetime drinking and I would keep it in the cellar for several more years before starting to drink it in earnest. It is a great and very classic vintage for this great property. 2025-2075. **95.**

1985 Château Latour Haut-Brion

The 1985 Latour Haut-Brion is a superb example of the vintage, and the only thing I can fault this outstanding wine for is the sad decision to change its label from its completely distinctive copper color to the more mundane, cream-colored label that graces the 1985. The wine offers up a simply stunning and classic bouquet of dark berries, cassis, new leather, cigar wrapper, dark soil, smoke and a bit of charred earth in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very refined for Latour Haut-Brion, with a superb core of fruit, melting tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and soil-driven finish. Great juice. 2014-2035. **93.**

1985 Château Pape Clément

The 1985 Pape Clément is an outstanding example of the vintage. The beautiful bouquet is a complex and very refined blend of black cherries, gentle meatiness, nutskin, a marvelously complex base of dark soil tones, cigar smoke, herbs and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, poised and velvety, with a great core of fruit, melting tannins, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and utterly classic finish. What a great era for this iconic property, which has so sadly lost its way in recent times. 2014-2045. **94.**



Looking across the spring vineyards to Château Latour à Pomerol.

Pomerol

1985 Château Certan de May

The 1985 vintage at Certan de May is one of my all-time favorites for this estate, and at age twenty-nine, the wine is drinking splendidly well. The utterly classic bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of dark berries, black plums, charred earth, espresso, herb tones, woodsmoke, dark soil and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, still a bit of backend tannin and lovely balance and complexity on the very long, very classy finish. A great vintage of Certan de May, the 1985 is drinking very well today, but will live for many decades. 2014-2040. **94+**.

1985 Château l'Église-Clinet

I had a couple of cases of the '85 l'Église-Clinet way back in the day and drank way too many bottles of this lovely wine in the first blush of youth. My dozen bottles are now long gone, so I was very pleased to cross paths with a bottle of this wine a year or so ago. The wine is really drinking beautifully, offering up a deep and complex nose of plums, black cherries, tobacco, black truffles, soil, herb tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite ready to drink, with pretty good complexity, very little remaining tannin, and very good length on the velvety finish. The delineation here is not quite first division, but the wine is very complex and it has that creaminess on the palate of mature Pomerol and more than its fair share of the 1985 vintage's elegance. Good juice. 2012-2030+. **94**.

1985 Château l'Évangile

The 1985 l'Évangile has long had a stellar reputation, as this was the first vintage at the estate after its purchase by Lafite-Rothschild, and this most recent bottle at our October tasting showed beautifully. The deep, pure and flamboyant nose jumps from the glass in a blend of roasted plums, black cherries, mocha, herb tones, a dollop of cigar smoke and plenty of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave and velvety on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, melting tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. A lovely vintage of l'Évangile that is making good on the considerable promise of its youth, but is certainly a bit more polished in style than the wines made here prior to the sale to Lafite. 2014-2035+. **93**.

1985 Château Lafleur

1985 is the first vintage that Château Lafleur's vinification was overseen by the team from J. P. Moueix and the wine out of the blocks certainly seemed a bit more politely styled than had been the case previously under the auspices of the Robin sisters. I had not tasted the wine since its relative youth and was truly delighted to be "blinded" on the wine in the fall of 2009. At that time, the wine was starting to show some secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of mocha, roasted plums, a touch of blood orange, singed tobacco, a beautifully complex base of soil with a very distinctive streak of iron in evidence and a touch of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly primary, with a rock solid core of fruit that shows a bit of the vintage's plushness in the center, suave tannins and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and tangy finish. It has now been five years since I last tasted this fine wine, which should be starting to get fairly close to full blossoming, but my instincts would be to still let its hibernate a bit longer in the cellar. 2020-2075. **95**.

1985 Château Latour à Pomerol

There was some speculation as to whether or not our bottle of 1985 Latour à Pomerol at our October tasting was pristine, as the wine seemed a tad lean in terms of fruit and perhaps this

was an indication of it having seen a bit of warmth prior to my purchasing the bottle last year at auction. That said, Robert Parker has always criticized Christian Moueix and his team for picking “too early” in the ’85 vintage, so perhaps this is the wine? In any case, I was hoping for just a bit more here, as the complex nose of black cherries, plums, a bit of green olive, coffee, herb tones, nutskin and vanillin oak is complex, but not particularly sweet. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and has a fine core, with good focus and grip, but with its remaining tannins seeming ever so faintly dry-edged in personality. The wine is long, complex and still quite good, but so many other vintages of Latour à Pomerol are superior to this showing of the 1985. Wine or bottle? 2014-2030. **89.**

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+.**

Lalande de Pomerol

1985 Château Grand Ormeau

Grand Ormeau was one of my favorite Right Bank values back in the day, but in recent years, the winery seems to have gotten lost in the diaspora of modern claret and is not making wines anywhere near as beautifully as they did back in the decade of the 1980s. I bought nearly a case of this wine in the last year at auction for around twenty dollars a bottle, which goes to show if you pay attention and are willing to bottom feed at auction, there are still roaring good deals out there. The wine is beautiful and a classic example of the ’85 vintage, wafting from the glass in a complex and refined aromatic constellation of plums, black cherries, a bit of tariness, tobacco smoke, herbs and a deft touch of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, just a touch of remaining tannin and lovely focus and grip on the long and velvety finish. A lovely wine at its apogee. 2014-2035. **90.**

St. Émilion

1985 Château l’Arrosée

Château l’Arrosée made such great wines in the decade of the 1960s and 1980s, and the 1985 is one of the finest recent vintages from this estate. It is such a pity that it has now been absorbed into Château Quintus, the new St. Émilion from the Dillon family, who seems to be looking to Pavie for their stylistic inspiration for their new project. In any event, the 1985 Château l’Arrosée is stunning, soaring from the glass in an opulent and very pure mélange of cherries, plums, menthol, mocha, nutskin, a fine base of soil tones, coffee and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, plush and rock solid at the core, with great focus and

grip, fairly low acids, melting tannins and excellent length on the velvety and very complex finish. A beautiful wine. 2014-2035. **93.**



1985 Château Ausone

The 1985 vintage of Château Ausone was not particularly touted when it was released, but this is a great wine that should ultimately prove to be one of the greatest Ausones of the decade of the 1980s. The bouquet is deep, pure and youthfully exotic, as it soars from the glass in a very vibrant blend of baked cherries, blood orange, menthol, woodsmoke, glorious soil tones, a touch of dill and a potpourri of other more classic fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very intensely flavored, with a sappy core of fruit, great soil inflection, ripe, well-integrated tannins and superb length and grip on the tangy finish. A classic Ausone in the making, I would not touch the '85 for another decade, despite the fact that it is already quite accessible. There are just too many layers of complexity still to unfold here to be opening bottles right now! 2020-2070. **94.**

1985 Château Canon

The 1985 Canon is a great example of the vintage, as it offers up the great purity and refinement that characterized the first decade of the 1985s in bottle and the added depth and

muscle that began to show in the top wines of the year after they had spent ten years in the cellar. The bouquet is deep, complex and vibrant, as it delivers scents of dark berries, black cherries, a touch of mocha, menthol, cigar smoke, the last vestiges of tobacco leaf and a lovely, deep base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and fresh, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins, excellent focus and breed and great length and grip on the complex and classy finish. I would still wait a few years to start drinking the '85 Canon with wild abandon- not because it is not delicious today- but rather because there are still additional layers of complexity to unfold with a bit more bottle age. A dynamite vintage of Canon and probably one of the greatest steals in the market today for a great wine from a great vintage that is not inordinately expensive. 2015-2060. **94.**

1985 Château Cheval Blanc

The 1985 Cheval Blanc is a beautiful bottle of young wine that still needs several years of cellaring to fully reach its apogee and start to show all of its multi-layered complexity. The bouquet is deep and clearly destined for profundity, but still a tad primary in its mélange of dark berries, menthol, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, smoke and a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite tight, with a great core of pure fruit, impeccable focus and balance, ripe tannins and great length and grip on the superbly elegant finish. This is an utterly refined vintage of Cheval Blanc that may in the long run outpace the more highly touted Chevals from the 1982 and 1983 vintages. A great wine in the making. 2015-2065+. **95+.**

1985 Château Figeac

The suave style of the 1985 vintage would seem perfectly suited to the style of Château Figeac, but in this particular case, the lack of rough edges on the vintage may be just a bit too much of a good thing for Figeac. The wine is now fully into its peak of drinkability and is a perfumed beauty, but with a rather laid back, low acid structure that may leave a few folks craving just a bit more backend grip on the palate. The nose is stunning and a classic Figeac blend of cherries, red plums, nutty overtones, cigar ash, menthol, cedar and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, silky and sweet at the core, with fine focus, melting tannins and fine length and complexity on the finish. A touch more grip would move this wine from the realm of very, very good to outstanding, as the balance here is excellent and should allow this vintage to continue to drink well for several decades. Despite its rather gentle nature, this is still one of my current favorite vintages of Figeac to drink from the decade of the 1980s. 2011-2040. **91.**

1985 Château Magdelaine

Magdelaine may well be the most overlooked examples of great claret in all of Bordeaux. I have had the good fortune to taste this vintage three times in the last year, and it has consistently shown magnificently well. The 1985 is simply a profound example of the vintage, soaring from the glass in a brilliant mélange of cherries, candied strawberries, plums, menthol, tobacco leaf, intense limestone soil tones, roses and a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, laser-like in its focus and rock solid at the core, with impressive acids, a fine delicate footprint, and great length and grip on the meltingly tannic finish. This wine's aromatic and flavor profile is not dissimilar to Canon, but it possesses the finesse and purity of soil expression that is much more akin to Ausone in the glory days. This is just a wonderful 1985 claret that has just about reached its apogee, but should continue to drink well for another forty years or more. 2014-2055+. **96.**

THE ANNUAL LOIRE VALLEY REPORT VINTAGES 2013, 2012 AND A HOST OF OLDER WINES



A July late afternoon, a few hours after localized hail had ransacked vineyards in Pouilly-Fumé and Sancerre.

It has been a relatively difficult spate of vintages in the Loire Valley since the superb back to back years of 2009 and 2010, as both 2011 and 2012 posed some serious challenges for *vignerons* in several of the regions along the river, and 2013 may have been the most difficult of the three most recent summers in this beautiful corner of France. The 2013 growing season in the Loire got off to a slow start, with a very cold winter and spring frosts retarding the start of the sap rising in places, where elsewhere, it caused damage to the budding and cut back on the potential crop. As has been the case in the last couple of years, the central Touraine section seemed to be singled out again in 2013 for the worst that Mother Nature had to throw at winegrowers, so that a late April frost cut back early yields in Montlouis vineyards by as much as thirty percent right out of the blocks, and there would be worse to come in this section. The eastern end of the Loire, around Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé saw some hail damage at the end of this month. The very cold winter and spring pushed flowering back a couple of weeks, and it became clear that the harvest was going to be late in 2013 across the entire region and *vignerons* would be struggling to get ripeness this year and that the *fin de saison* was going to be key. The Touraine was again singled out for abuse in June, as a devastating hail storm hit Vouvray in early

June, wiping out fully seventy percent of the potential crop for 2013, and probably causing damage and stress to the vines that will also affect the vigor of the vines in 2014 as well. The hail also cut a nasty path across Chinon, so yields here are way down and quality very mixed. The hailstones were huge during this very violent storm, with vineyards ravaged, local wildlife pummeled and ice the size of golf balls ripping a brutal swath through the central Loire. By the time the flowering got underway in earnest at the tail end of June, the vintage was already a week behind the difficult year of 2012 and more like three weeks behind schedule of a typical vintage in the region.

After all the storms, rain and cold weather of the spring and early summer, July and August turned hot and bone-dry, so that the vines went from near winter conditions to baking in a drought, with a great many vines shutting down from hydric stress and maturation falling even further behind schedule. The *vignerons* simply could not win in 2013. The month of September started out hot and dry- a continuation of August's weather, but as the month worked to a close, it turned rainy and further caused difficulties with attaining ripeness and spreading plenty of rot in the vineyards. Wine growers in the Loire really could have used (and deserved, if Mother Nature was just, after the depredations of the earlier part of the summer) sunny weather right out into October, but it was not to be, and estates had to rush to get the crop off of the vines as quickly as possible in the rain or its immediate aftermath. Harvesters worked very long hours, gathering as much of the crop as fast as possible, before rot wiped out the year completely. There was just not a lot to get enthused about out in the vineyards in 2013, but surprisingly, some very nice wines have managed to emerge despite all of the vagaries of the vintage. The vintage character varied region by region quite markedly in 2013 (as it had in both 2011 and 2012), but overall, one can say that pretty much across the board, the 2013 vintage is a step down in quality from either of its two difficult predecessors. That run of strong vintages in the Loire from 2004 through 2010 really seems to be ancient history today!

In Muscadet, growers were forced to pick during or immediately after the rains, with very modest ripeness, and it was a question of gathering the crop during the end of September rains, with the juice underripe, and then de-acidifying to try and make the wines approachable out of the blocks, or waiting a handful of days, for the rains to stop, the water to work through the vines a bit and the sugars to climb a very small amount higher, with the attendant loss of acidity levels. From what I have tasted in Muscadet, it seems that the top producers opted for the second option, so that the wines tend to show pretty good character and complexity, but to be a tad soft and open-knit out of the blocks and likely to be at their best in their collective youth. Like all of the wines in the Loire in 2013, they tend to be low in alcohol (where growers did not over-chapitalize, as it was allowed to chapitalize a full two degrees of potential alcohol in this vintage), but soundly ripe and show nice middleweight personalities. Anjou was probably one of the most favored sub-regions (in the context of the summer of 2013!) in the whole Loire, as there was no hail damage here, and vines produced pretty good ripeness for both the chenins and the red varieties here and the wines look to be some of the strongest of the vintage. Of course, the rainy weather that started at the end of September and continued on into October periodically, did not make the production of sweet botrytis wines particularly easy or successful. In the Touraine, the chenin-based wines of Vouvray and Montlouis are clean and a bit deeper-pitched in aromatics than is customary, as a result of the hail storms that affected the two regions, and they too will be best in their early days, but they are far better than one might have imagined.

But, of course, there will not be a lot of wine here, as yields were microscopic. The sauvignon blanc wines in this central region seem to have been spared most of the hail damage of the spring and mid-summer, and are fairly low in alcohol, but clean, bright and bouncy.

For the white wines in the eastern end of the Loire in Sancerre, Pouilly-Fumé and their environs, ripeness levels were not good when the rains arrived in late September and early October, so growers were faced with either waiting out the rain and letting the water work its way through the plants' systems, or picking in the rain and not risking the threat of rot. The rot moved through the vineyards quickly when the rains eased off, so there was only a week window where one could harvest after the rains and before a very substantial chunk of the crop was lost to rot, so the options were pretty limited here. Those that took the early picking option brought in grapes that were still not ripe, and many had to de-acidify and chapitalize aggressively, whereas those who waited out the rains, had to be very draconian in terms of selection, or got rot taint into the wines. Given the challenges, it really is impressive how many *vignerons* got it right and made very attractive wines here in 2013, but the overall quality of the winemaking in this part of the Loire is really very, very high these days, and there are a lot of well-made wines to be found here in this vintage. In general, these sauvignon-based wines will need to be drunk in their early years, but they are amongst the finest set of wines to be found in the Loire in 2013.

On the red wine side of the ledger, picking in the central Loire appellations of Saumur-Champigny, Bourgueil and Chinon began around the 10th of October, due again to autumn rains starting to settle into the area, and this was probably earlier than most *vignerons* would have liked, as ripeness levels were far from optimal and varied from parcel to parcel. Generally speaking, the winegrowers who do the best work in the vineyards had better ripeness levels to work with (though still nothing to write home about) than those who are a bit more *laissez-faire* when it comes to viticulture, so there are some wines that are lean and a bit green and likely to always stay that way, while others will prove to be very suave middleweights over the course of their lives. As is so often the case, it really depended on how hard and how well you were willing to work in the vineyards in the months leading up to the harvest. As noted above, Chinon was pummeled by the hail in June. The Touraine reds that I have tasted have been a surprisingly successful set of very low octane wines, with alcohol levels often in the ten to eleven percent range, but with fine balance and surprisingly good intensity of flavor for their level of ripeness. This sub-region has a lot of natural winemakers, who would not be interested in chapitalizing in most cases, and there are a few that probably do not have quite enough stuffing to buffer their bit of tannin, whereas others are really very, very lovely wines that pack an awful lot of flavor complexity for their modest octanes. As is the case with the dry whites, there are some very good reds from the Anjou in 2013, as this area had things a touch easier than other sectors of the Loire.

As readers will recall from last year's two reports on the Loire Valley, 2012 was not a whole lot easier than 2013, but the vagaries of the vintage (poor flowering, hail, rot, mildew and a host of other vineyard depredations) were not as insurmountable as in 2013, so that careful *vignerons* were able to at least bring in a small crop of very nicely ripe grapes the small yields were at least partially set off by high quality wines. Viewed now in the context of the far less favored wines of 2013, the 2012s that I tasted for this report were really showing to advantage. 2011 was another tough year on the Loire River, with an early spring and flowering undone by cold, overcast mid-summer weather and the autumn rains arrived here before *vignerons* really

would have liked, so that harvesting got underway under duress again and the wines are a bit of a mixed bag, depending primarily on region and skill sets of respective winegrowers. However, in general, the best 2011s are probably a half step ahead of the most successful 2013s from the region, with the unsuccessful 2011s about on par with their less successful brethren from 2013. In short, the Loire Valley could really use another 2009 or 2010 vintage, or even a 2006, at this point in time, as things have been really tough here from 2011 to 2013. But, despite the rather brutal set of challenges cast in front of *vignerons* during the growing season of 2013, there are really a surprisingly large number of very good wines, with balance, complexity, low alcohol levels and wide open personalities that will make for impressive early drinking. It is not a great vintage by any stretch of the imagination, but if one picks and chooses with care, there are a lot of good bottles out there from this tough vintage, and of course, there remains still plenty of the top wines from both 2011 and 2012 still in the pipeline, and a few of the later releases from 2010 are just finding their way onto the market right now.

Sparkling Wines

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

The L'Amarante Vin Mousseux from Domaine de l'Enchantoir is one of the most unique sparkling wines I have tasted, as it is comprised of one hundred percent cabernet franc. The property is based in Saumur, but I do not know if these cabernet franc vines actually lie outside of the appellation or not, as 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, with the wine offering up a very cabernet franc nose of dark berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of tree bark and espresso. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and frothy, with nice focus and depth, but a bit of backend tannin in this iteration which makes the finish a bit more heavy-handed than the one I tasted a year ago. The wine still has good length and is well-made, but I preferred last year's version, which seemed a bit lighter on its feet than this year's version. 2014-2016+? **86.**

Les Maisons Bullées Blanc- Paul et Corinne Gillet (Les Maisons Brûlées) Crown Cap

Paul and Corinne Gillet have taken over Les Maisons Brûlées from retiring Michel Augé, and this is their first vintage of bubbly since the transition (though they worked the final two harvest at the domaine with Monsieur Augé prior to taking over with the 2013 harvest). This is a new and witty name for their sparkling wine, and their first release is lovely, wafting from the glass in a vibrant mélange of tart orange, quince, stony minerality, some musky floral tones and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with slightly larger *mousse* than the lovely Bulle bottling from Hervé Villemade, but with fine focus and grip on the long and snappy finish. The grape used here is sauvignon blanc, which has given the wine lovely citric vibrancy and the aforementioned muskiness that is quite appealing. Good juice. 2014-2019. **88.**

Bubbly Pétillante Naturelle Rosé "Lot BU-13"- Nathalie Gaubicher (Crown Cap) 1.5 lt.

The Pétillante Naturelle Rosé "Bubbly" from Nathalie Gaubicher is made entirely from Cinsault and the wine offers up a lovely pale salmon color. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of white cherries, chicory, woodsmoke, spice tones and soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch volatile, with frothy *mousse*, good acids and focus, a sound core and a long, gently tannic finish. This is pretty idiosyncratic juice (and probably the first sparkling Cinsault I have ever tasted), and while it works quite well with a variety of different dishes at the table, it's a bit sturdy for simply sipping. 2014-2019. **86.**

Les Maisons Bullées Rosé- Paul et Corinne Gillet (Les Maisons Brûlées) Crown Cap

The Les Maisons Bullées Rosé from Paul and Corinne Gillet is made entirely from gamay and is a lovely, salmon color. The lovely bouquet shares some of the musky floral tones with the Blanc bottling, offering up a bright and complex nose of desiccated cherries, tangerine, a touch of honeysuckle, lovely minerality and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and flat out delicious, with a bit of residual sweetness that beautifully buffers the snappy acids and superb minerality. The *mousse* is quite fine, the finish long and poised, and though there is just a touch of volatile acidity here, it tends to lift and sharpen the aromatics and flavors today, giving the wine great personality. I would tend to drink this on the early side, when it is at its exuberant best, but this is really tasty out of the blocks. 2014-2016+? **89.**

Pow Blop Wizz Sparkling Rosé Pétillante Naturelle- Olivier Lemasson (Crown Cap)

The Pow Blop Wizz Sparkling Rosé from Olivier Lemasson is made up of a *cépages* of Grolleau and Pinot d'Aunis, with the wine offering up lovely salmon rose petal color and plenty of frothy *mousse*. The wine is quite low in alcohol at ten percent, and offers up a bright bouquet of tart cherries, melon, lovely minerality, a touch of rye toast and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and well-balanced, with fine mid-palate depth, nice *mousse* and a long, crisp and ever so slightly volatile finish, which tends (today) to simply heighten the aromatic intensity. This is really delicious for near-term drinking. 2014-2016. **88.**

Moussamoussettes Rosé Pétillante Naturelle- Agnès et René Mosse (Crown Cap)

The Moussamoussettes Rosé from Agnès et René Mosse is the first sparkling wine that I have ever tasted from this talented couple. The color is quite dark for a naturally pétillant rosé, with a vivid cherry red color hailing from a touch of skin contact from the Grolleau and Gamay grapes used for this bottling. The bouquet is a bright and slightly volatile mix of blood orange, raspberry, lovely soil tones, a bit of smokiness and orange peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, frothy and nicely focused, with a good core, crisp acids and very good length and grip on the quite vinous finish. Good juice. 2014-2018. **88.**

Pétillante Naturelle Rosé- Puzelat-Bonhomme (Natural Cork and Wire Basket)

The new release of Pétillante Naturelle Rosé from Puzelat-Bonhomme is made entirely from cabernet franc and offers up a lovely, pale salmon color, flecked with copper. The bouquet is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of white cherries, orange, smoky tones, a bit of clove and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and frothy, with superb depth at the core, just a bit of residual sweetness balancing out the acids, refined *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the complex and really lovely finish. There is just a whisper of volatile acidity lurking here as well, which again, I think augurs for drinking this on the early side, but it is so tasty right now, that it would probably be hard to hold in the cellar in any case. What a lovely way to drink cabernet franc! 2014-2017. **90.**

Bulle Blanche Pétillante Naturelle- Hervé Villemade (Disgorged February 2014) Crown Cap

Hervé Villemade is the proprietor of the fine Cheverny estate of Domaine de Moulin, and his sparkling wine is made from the Menu Pineau grape. The wine offers up a bright and zesty bouquet of lime, green apple, lovely minerality, a bit of menthol and gentle notes of bread dough. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with frothy *mousse*, snappy acids and lovely mineral drive on the long and quite complex finish. This bubbly is sealed with a crown top, but it is very well made and offers up impressive depth and length. Fine juice. 2014-2020+. **89.**

Muscadet

While an ocean of machine-harvested, innocuous Muscadet continues to exist, the quality of the very top producers and their terroir-specific wines has never been better in the Nantais and lovers of very high quality Muscadet have never had more good options on the market than is the case at the present time. As I noted above, the 2013 vintage was no great shakes in the region, but I was very impressed with how many excellent examples of 2013 vintage Muscadet I was able to taste from the stars in the region, and many of these also continue to have wines from 2012 and older also available from their very finest vineyard sites and their cuvées that spend extended periods of time on their lees. For many years, the names of Marc Ollivier (now very ably joined in partnership by Rémi Branger at Domaine de la Pépière) and Pierre Luneau (now working alongside his son, Pierre-Marie Luneau) at Domaine Luneau-Papin were the leaders of top flight Muscadet here in the US, and almost singlehandedly, these two estates have raised an awareness of just how beautiful and long-lived the wines from this region can be if produced from rational yields, great terroirs and fermented with indigenous yeasts. However, one really needs to go back to the days when Guy Bossard was trailblazing at his Domaine de l'Écu and add his name to the list of Muscadet trailblazers, as he was one of the very first vignerons in the Loire to adopt organic viticultural practices (all the way back in the 1970s!) and his vineyards have been farmed biodynamically for more than twenty years now. Monsieur Bossard, whose first vintage was 1972, is a contemporary of both Marc Ollivier and Pierre Luneau, and like Monsieur Ollivier at Domaine de la Pépière, he had no heirs poised to take over at Domaine de l'Écu, so he has sold his property to a passionate new owner (and long-time client) of the estate, Frederick Niger van Herck, who has retained Monsieur Bossard as a consultant and is determined to maintain the superb heritage of great wines produced from this domaine. Add to these three iconic estates in Muscadet the likes of the brothers Jean-Jacques and Rémi Bonnet (who are making brilliant wines), as well as Jo Landron (whose new releases I did not manage to get around to tasting in time for this report, but will most assuredly do so in the next month or so) and one quickly realizes that Muscadet, at the top end of producers, is in the midst of a pretty amazing renaissance.

When one adds to the growing number of outstanding, terroir-driven bottlings of great Muscadet from the top estates the fact that I have not yet crossed paths with a single bottle of prematurely oxidized Muscadet (and the notes below stretch back to the 2000 vintage) and it is pretty clear that this is one of the most exciting regions for cellar-worthy white wines currently out on the market. I would have been late in noticing a great many of these changes sweeping through the region towards higher and higher quality if it had not been for the passionate championing of these wines ten or twelve years ago by a dear friend of mine named Joe Dougherty, who recognized a long time ago just how beautiful the top bottlings from folks like Messieurs Ollivier and Luneau can be and spread the word to all of his wine-loving friends. Joe suddenly and tragically passed away at the beginning of September of this year, and I thought it would only be fitting to mention a belated word of gratitude to him for sharing the light of Muscadet with me back in the day. Several of the older bottles reported on in this report came from Joe's cellar, as we had the opportunity to spend some time together only a couple of weeks before his passing and characteristically, Joe was packing bottles of both Muscadet and Vouvray to share with his friends. The image of Joe emerging from a mutual friend's cellar with his double magnum of 2007 Granit de Clisson from Domaine de la Pépière at a large tasting this past August, with the swirl of smoke off the grill (which he had been manning all day) setting the

backdrop, will be a memory I will keep with me a very long time. I should note that I am not the only Muscadet fan that learned about the joie de vivre to be found in the wines of this region at Joe's side, as the thirty-odd guests at the tasting drained the double magnum of Granit de Clisson in record time- and with emphatically no shortage of other great vinous options on the table!

20113 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “les Dabinières”- Jean-Jacques et Rémi Bonnet

As I observed in the note on the 2011 release of this excellent Muscadet, the “les Dabinières” is a single vineyard bottling from Jean-Jacques et Rémi Bonnet is all hand-harvested and hails from a vineyard that is certified organic and on the way to *biodynamique* cultivation. The soils here are mica-schist and gneiss. The 2013 Dabinières is a very good example of this difficult vintage, but the vagaries of this tough growing season can be sensed here a bit in the slightly less racy cut and backend grip than what is typical of the wines from Domaine Bonnet. The bouquet on the 2013 is lovely, offering up a wide open blend of lemon, green apple, ocean breeze and a lovely base of slightly stony soil aspects. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and gently leesy in character, with a good core, fine focus, sound framing acids and good length on the finish. This is a very nice wine for relatively near-term drinking, but it will not last like most vintages of this fine single vineyard wine. 2014-2019. **88.**

2013 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “les Gautronnières”- Jean-Jacques et Rémi Bonnet

The les Gautronnières bottling from the Bonnet brothers is relatively new for the domaine, as it is produced a ten hectare parcel of vines from the Château les Gautronnières which the Bonnet brothers purchased earlier this millennium. The soils here are amphibolite, which produces a very stony personality in the resulting wine and the 2013 is one of the finest examples I have tasted from this vintage. The complex and quite deep bouquet wafts from the glass in a very refined blend of bread fruit, a touch of tart orange, a superb base of stony minerality, *fleur de sel*, a bit of smokiness and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and very long and classy, with a fine core, very good acids for the vintage and very good grip for a 2013 Muscadet on the long and vibrant finish. Lovely juice. 2014-2019. **90.**

20113 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “Côtes de Grandlieu”- Domaine Haut Bourg

The 20113Muscadet “Côtes de Grandlieu” from Domaine Haut Bourg is an excellent example of the vintage, offering up a fine bouquet of tart orange, sea breeze, stony soil tones, a bit of citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a very good core, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and wide open finish. This is drinking beautifully out of the blocks, and though it will not be particularly long-lived, there is an awful lot of pleasure to be had here in the next three or four years. 2014-2017. **89.**

2013 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine- Clos de la Lénaigerie (Jérôme Choblet)

The 2013 Muscadet from Jérôme Choblet comes again with a screwcap this year (at least here in the states), and that is hardly a welcome addition to what is quite obviously a good wine under the vagaries of its chosen closure. My sample of the 2013 is not as reduced as the 2012 was at the same time last fall, but it is already starting to show the first signs of its ultimate death, as the bouquet is very, very timid, offering up feeble scents of green apple, citrus peel, a whisper of leanness and gentle saline notes. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and shows a good core, with solid focus, but a short, clipped finish that is already starting to get just a bit bitter on the backend, as the reduction starts to make itself felt and screwcap clamps its iron teeth down on what could have been a very nice bottle of Muscadet. I would drink this wine very, very

quickly, while the reduction is in its early stages, but this very good bottling is clearly in need of a new closure in the future, as good raw materials here are going to waste. Surely someone in the pipeline can step up and do the right thing for the ultimate consumers of Monsieur Choblet's basic bottling? 2014-2015? **84.**



2013 Muscadet Côtes de Grandlieu sur Lie “Les Parcelles” – Domaine Hautes Noëles

The 2013 Muscadet “les Parcelles” from Serge Bâtard is a lovely bottle that shows excellent mid-palate amplitude and a nice touch of white flowers in the aromatics that is quite attractive. The bouquet offers up a pretty blend of apple, tangerine, very discreet leesiness, a nice touch of soil and the aforementioned white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and generous on the attack, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, intensely flavored finish. I am not certain, but it seems that Monsieur Bâtard uses commercial yeasts here, and if so, he could take what is really a lovely bottle and take it up to the next level by opting for indigenous yeasts (if I am correct in my impression). But, this is a very well-made wine with impressive depth and backend amplitude, and one can find a lot to enjoy here. 2014-2020. **89.**

2013 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Clos des Allées” V.V.- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The 2013 Clos des Allées from Luneau-Papin is a lovely bottle of young Muscadet, with good cut and grip and a bit of racy acidity that shows it was picked before the autumn rains arrived (or while they were falling, as the acids have stayed nice and zesty). The bouquet is wide

open and excellent, offering up scents of lime, bread fruit, stony soil tones, sea salts and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zippy, with lovely mineral drive, good, but not great depth at the core, fine complexity and a long, vibrant and classy finish. Good juice and a noteworthy success for the vintage. I have always loved the striking green foil label of this bottling, which is one of the finest packages to be found in the Loire, but I cannot decide if the wine now being bottled in a chardonnay-shaped bottle adds gravitas to the package, or if I preferred the old, classic, higher-shouldered Muscadet bottle. But, at least the excellent quality of this wine, which is one of Muscadet's finest entry level wines, remains unchanged. 2014-2022. **90.**

2013 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Dom. Pierre de la Grange” V.V.- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The 2013 Domaine Pierre de la Grange bottling from Pierre-Marie Luneau is another outstanding example of the vintage. The wine is a touch softer than the Clos des Allées, which makes me think this one was picked after the rains had cleared through, but the wine has lovely complexity on both the nose and palate and still sufficient bounce to make for vibrant early drinking. The fine nose is a blend of lemon, bread fruit, *fleur de sel*, ocean breezes, white flowers and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and beautifully focused, with solid mid-palate depth, nice framing acids and very good length on the classy finish. This will not make old bones, but it will deliver plenty of enjoyment over the coming five years. 2014-2019. **88.**

2013 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Clos des Briords” V.V.- Dom. de la Pépière

The Clos des Briords Cuvée Vieilles Vignes from Domaine de la Pépière is always one of the great wines of Muscadet, and even in a tough vintage like 2013, my pulse starts to race a bit when I pull the cork to see how the wine is going to be. The wine is absolutely transcendental of the vintage, with the classic cut and grip that are so rare in 2013, to go along with lovely depth and complexity on both the nose and palate. The wine jumps from the glass in a mix of lemon, green apple, briny soil tones, white flowers and just a whisper of leesiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very soil-driven, with lovely focus and grip, a very good core of fruit, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the quite open finish. In a great classic year, this wine would not be as forward as the 2013 is right out of the blocks, but that is the only atypical characteristic that this vintage of Clos des Briords shows today. A stellar success. 2014-2025. **92.**

2013 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Les Gras Moutons” - Domaine de la Pépière

As I mentioned a year ago, 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 2013 version is a lovely example of the vintage and offers up a youthful and classic nose of bread fruit, lemon, stony minerality, a touch of straw and a gently leesy topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and nicely mineral-driven, with a good core of fruit, good acids (particularly for the vintage), lovely focus and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. No one will ever confuse this with a great vintage from Domaine de la Pépière, but at the same time, this an utterly complete wine that shows just how well one could do in this difficult year with a great *terroir* and careful husbandry. Lovely juice. 2014-2020+. **91.**

2012 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “les Laures Granit de Vallet”- J.J. et Rémi Bonnet

As I mentioned in my note on the 2011, the les Laures bottling from the Bonnet brothers hails from the single vineyard of “Granit de Vallet”, which is the same vineyard from which Marc Ollivier’s “Granit de Clisson” bottling is produced, and in fact the two parcels are contiguous. The Bonnets’ vines here are forty years of age and the vineyard is in the process to conversion to *biodynamique* cultivation. The 2012 has turned out splendidly and is a very, very successful follow-up to the fine wine they produced here in the 2011 vintage, as the wine soars from the glass in a complex and utterly stellar bouquet of lemon, grapefruit, sea salts, white flowers, gentle leesiness, briny soil tones and a bit of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a rock solid core of fruit, racy acids, laser-like focus and outstanding length and grip on the electric and utterly classic finish. I am a huge fan of Monsieur Ollivier’s Granit de Clisson, which has pushed top end Muscadet to a completely new level since its inaugural vintage, but the les Laures bottling from the Bonnet brothers is in the same league, and is probably half the price of the Granit de Clisson these days, so this should be an absolute must buy for lovers of *terroir*-driven, stellar Muscadet! In New York, where prices are hardly inexpensive for wine, the 2012 les Laures sells for around \$15 a bottle, so do not miss this wine! 2014-2030. **94**.

2012 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “Gneiss”- Domaine de l’Écu

As I noted a year ago, the 2011s were the first wines I had ever tasted from Domaine de l’Écu, and as strong as those wines were in the context of the vintage of 2011, the 2012s are a dramatic step up and show the true quality of these wines in a top flight vintage! The 2012 Gneiss bottling, which hails from micro-schist soils, spends fully fifteen months aging on its fine lees prior to bottling, and the wine is stunning in this vintage. The vibrant and very complex nose soars from the glass in an electric mélange of green apple, orange peel, salty air, white flowers, gentle and very refined leesiness, a touch of straw and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very soil-driven in personality, with a great core of fruit, laser-like focus and great cut and grip on the vibrant and dancing finish. Brilliant Muscadet! 2014-2035. **94+**.

2012 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “Orthogneiss”- Domaine de l’Écu

Domaine de l’Écu’s Orthogneiss bottling is produced from vineyards with metamorphosed rock that is far more granitic than the straight micro schist found in the vineyards that make up the Gneiss bottling. As I mentioned last year, the domaine has old vines, with the average age fully fifty years old, and the 2012 Orthogneiss is stunning, as it jumps from the glass in a smokier constellation of bread fruit, pear, ocean breeze, beautiful leesy tones, dried flowers and an overtly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless on the attack, with superb mid-palate depth, outstanding focus and grip and a very, very long, crisp and supremely elegant finish. Great juice. 2014-2035. **94+**.

2012 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “Granite”- Domaine de l’Écu

The 2012 Granite bottling from Messieurs Bossard and van Herck, as the name suggests, comes from hard granite soils and the vineyards for this cuvée are planted with forty-five to fifty-five year-old vines. As was the case with the very strong 2011, the extra mineral drive of the 2012 Granite bottling makes for a very, very special example of Muscadet, as the wine soars from the glass in a blaze of tart orange, smoke, very stony and complex minerality, bread fruit, leesy tones, lemongrass and a gently briny topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly refined on the attack, with a rock solid core, great stony soil signature, snappy acids

and stunning length and grip on the impeccably balanced and laser-like finish. Breathtakingly beautiful Muscadet! 2014-2035+. **96.**

2012 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Le L d’Or” Granit Vallet- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The 2012 of “Le L d’Or” Granit Vallet from Domaine Luneau-Papin marks the first vintage with the striking new label and bottle for this iconic Muscadet bottling. The vintage fully lives up to the exalted reputation of this wine, as it offers up an excellent aromatic constellation of tangerine, stony minerality, lemon, spring flowers, citrus peel, ocean breeze and a touch of leanness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and racy, with an excellent core of fruit, fine cut and grip and a long, youthful and intensely flavored finish. After all of the laid back structures of 2013 Muscadets, it is nice to pop a bottle that is youthfully structured and really in need of a few years bottle age to blossom! 2016-2035. **94.**

2012 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Butte de la Roche”- Domaine Luneau-Papin

This cuvée is named for its vineyard, la Butte de la Roche, with 2008 being the first vintage that the Luneau family produced a wine from their new acquisition. This is a great site, with a unique geological composition of red igneous rock and the 2012 is a truly brilliant bottle of Muscadet, offering up a vibrant and magically complex bouquet of tart orange, lemon, ocean breeze, kaleidoscopic minerality, gentle leanness, citrus zest and a nice touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and very complex, with great cut and focus, a rock solid core and outstanding length and grip on the laser-like finish. The 2010 la Butte de la Roche was probably the finest young Muscadet I have ever tasted, and the 2012 is an awfully strong follow-up. 2014-2030+. **94.**

2011 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Le L d’Or”- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The 2011 Le L d’Or” from Domaine Luneau-Papin is a superb follow-up to the magical 2010, which I urge folks to still keep an eye out for if they cross paths with, as it is a brilliant young bottle of Muscadet. But, back to this outstanding 2011, which jumps from the glass in a vibrant mélange of tart pear, lime blossoms, green melon, beautifully complex and refined leesy tones, a superb base of soil tones and a faint hint of bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and seamless, with a fine core, ripe acids and excellent complexity and grip on the long and focused finish. This is not from a top-notch vintage, but it is an outstanding wine that is drinking gloriously right out of the blocks. 2014-2025. **92+.**

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

The 2010 Le L d’Or from Pierre and Pierre-Marie Luneau continues to blossom beautifully with bottle age, and at age four, it is starting to really open up on both the nose and palate and show all of its constituent components to fine advantage. The stunning nose soars from the glass in a blaze of lemon, tart pear, beautifully complex minerality, a myriad of leesy tones, ocean breeze, white flowers and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great cut and grip, laser-like focus and outstanding length and grip on the pure and perfectly balanced finish. A year ago, this wine was fairly briny and stony in personality, but its secondary layers have now risen to the surface, and the wine seems far more refined and complex, as some of the discreet leesy tones have filled in the sharp edges this wine had in its electric youth. It is a brilliant bottle of Muscadet that is just starting to enter its primetime of drinkability, but will probably last another twenty-five years in bottle! 2014-2035+. **94+.**

2010 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Excelsior”- Domaine Luneau-Papin

As I noted last year, the Excelsior bottling from Pierre-Marie Luneau is crafted from seventy-five year-old vines originally planted from *selection massale* cuttings in a vineyard with fine southern exposure. I had loved the 2009 version, and the new release of the 2010 may well be even a hair better. The deep, pure and nascently complex nose offers up a refined blend of apple, lemon, spring flowers, beautifully complex, gentle leesy tones, a great base of salty soil, lemongrass and just a whisper of the ocean breezes to come. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with a lovely core, impeccable focus and balance, bright acids and a very long, perfectly balanced and youthful finish. This will be a great bottle of Muscadet (it already is!), but for full effect, tuck it away in the cellar for a few years and really let it blossom fully, as it is quite tightly-knit behind its effortless structural veneer. It is decidedly more youthful today than the Luneau family’s glorious 2010 Le L d’Or bottling. 2016-2035+. **95.**



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

The Pueri Solis cuvée is a special bottling that Pierre-Marie Luneau produced to reflect this warm and sunny vintage. This “Solar Child”, as Monsieur Luneau has dubbed the wine, hails from vineyards in the family’s home commune of Landreau and spent fully thirty-two months aging on its lees prior to bottling in the summer of 2012. The wine offers up a stunningly expressive bouquet of fresh pineapple, apple, a beautifully complex base of soil, white flowers, a touch of straw, discreet brininess and a gloriously complex potpourri of leesy-derived nuances

that are elegant in the extreme. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and very complex, with great mid-palate depth, outstanding acids, impeccable balance and a very long, refined and zesty finish of great elegance and purity. This is a wine of a warm summer, coupled to unerring respect for *terroir* on the part of the *vigneron*- in short, very special juice. 2014-2025+. **94+**.

2007 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Granite de Clisson” – Dom. de la Pépière (3 lt.)

Only Joe Dougherty would have had the foresight to buy 2007 Granite de Clisson in double magnum, and the wine was served as a festive centerpiece to a birthday dinner for forty people in early August. The wine is absolutely stellar, wafting from the glass in a complex and blossoming bouquet of sweet grapefruit, white peach, briny topnotes, a stunning base of granitic minerality and plenty of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core of fruit, superb focus and grip and a very long, pure and vibrant finish. This wine was in a lineup of amazing old Bordeaux and it was inhaled, while several decanters of 1966 and 1970 claret were made to wait! A stunningly beautiful bottle of Muscadet. 2014-2030. **95**.

2000 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine- Domaine de la Pépière

The 2000 regular bottling of Muscadet from Marc Ollivier is every bit as fresh and vibrant as the Clos des Briords and still has plenty of life in it. The superb bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of lemon, green apple, white flowers, a touch of lanolin and a smorgasbord of granitic soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and very minerally in personality, with a fine core, very good focus and balance and plenty of cut on the long finish. This is a bit more high-toned than the Clos de Briords 2000, but every bit as zesty and intriguing. 2014-2025+. **93**.

2000 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Clos des Briords” V.V.- Dom. de la Pépière

The 2000 Clos des Briords is drinking beautifully at age fourteen, with the wine wide open and still as fresh and vibrant as anyone could ask for from a mature bottle of Muscadet. The deep and complex nose wafts from the glass in a succulent blend of apple, orange zest, saline soil tones, a touch of lanolin and a bit of wet stoniness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, plenty of complexity, very good acidity and lovely length and grip on the classic finish. This is a beautiful wine at its apogee, but with still plenty of life ahead of it. 2014-2025. **94**.

Muscadet Rouge Bottlings

2013 Gamay- Domaine les Hautes Noëllles

This was the first gamay bottling I have tasted from Serge Bâtard’s Domaine les Hautes Noëllles. The wine is nicely ripe at twelve percent alcohol and offers up a bright bouquet of cherries, cranberries, woodsmoke, a touch of chicory and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with good mid-palate concentration, lovely transparency and a long, gently tannic and bouncy finish. Good juice and an excellent value. 2014-2020+. **88**.

2013 Hého “le Rouge”- Domaine les Hautes Noëllles

The 2013 Hého “le Rouge” bottling from Domaine les Hautes Noëllles is comprised of a blend of forty-five percent cabernet franc, forty-five percent grolleau noir (the primary grape used for Rosé d’Anjou) and ten percent gamay, with the latter two grapes carbonically macerated. The wine is excellent, wafting from the glass in a blend of dark berries, tobacco leaf, lovely soil nuances, espresso and just a touch of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the

wine is medium-bodied, complex and focused, with impressive intensity of flavor, a bit of backend tannin and fine length and grip on the wide open and tangy finish. This is really a superb wine, with backend intensity that belies its middleweight format. 2014-2022+. **89.**

Anjou and Coteaux du Layon

2012 Anjou Blanc- Thibaud Boudignon

Thirty-two year-old Thibaud Boudignon wears two winemaking hats in the Loire these days- by day he is the winemaker at the sizable, twenty-seven hectare estate of Château Soucherie, and on the side he farms two hectares of his vines in Anjou. His own parcels lie right on the border of Savennières, with a small percentage of his vines in the AOC of Savennières, and everything else entitled to Anjou Blanc or Rouge appellations. He has both cabernet franc and chenin blanc, and his 2012 Anjou Blanc shows off good depth and complexity on both the nose and palate. The chenin vines used for this bottling are forty years of age, and the wine offers up a complex nose of peach, beeswax, melon, chalky soil tones, a touch of honey and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with moderate, framing acids, good focus and a long, substantial and elegant finish. This wine does not have a lot of cut and grip, but it is clean, deep and quite succulent on the backend and a noteworthy success for the vintage. 2014-2016. **88.**

2012 Anjou Blanc “à François(e)”- Thibaud Boudignon

The Anjou Blanc “à François(e)” bottling from Thibaud Boudignon pays homage to both his grandfather, François and his mother, Françoise. I am not sure of the differences between this and his regular bottling of Anjou Blanc, as copious searching on the web simply produced accolades about the wine, but no information about its vineyards or winemaking. It is a touch riper than the regular 2012 Anjou Blanc, coming in at thirteen percent, and offers up an excellent bouquet of apple, pear, paraffin, lovely soil tones, white flowers and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, moderate acids and very good length and grip on the ever so slightly tannic finish. As both Anjou Blanc bottlings are barrel fermented by Monsieur Boudignon, I am assuming that the cuvée “à François(e)” sees some of the newer barrels. This is a very good bottle, with plenty of depth and intensity. 2014-2019. **90.**

2012 Anjou Blanc “Le Clos des Rouliers”- Domaine Richard Leroy

Richard Leroy is one of the finest winemakers in the entire Loire Valley, and his brilliant wines deserve to be far more widely known! Monsieur Leroy’s Le Clos des Rouliers vineyard is located between the appellations of Coteaux du Layon and Quart de Chaumes. The 2012 Clos des Rouliers is a stunning wine, soaring from the glass in a youthful mélange of tangerine, sweet quince, lanolin, a hint of honeycomb, a beautiful base of soil and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and electric, with a great core, laser-like focus and superb length and grip on the racy finish. In the past, 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. They are two superb wines, and the 2012 Clos des Rouliers is pure chenin magic! 2014-2035. **94.**

2012 Anjou Blanc “Les Noëls de Montbenault”- Domaine Richard Leroy

As I noted last year, the Les Noëls de Montbenault vineyards is the larger and (slightly) superior parcel 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 stunning 2012 version has done justice to both this great *terroir* and the venerable age of the vines, as the wine delivers a spectacular bouquet of pear, tangerine, salty soil tones, citrus peel, chalky nuances and a lovely floral topnote redolent of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly refined in personality, with great mid-palate depth, excellent bounce and structure and a very, very long, elegant and zesty finish. Another absolutely brilliant wine. 2014-2035+. **95+**.

2011 Anjou Blanc “Litus”- Eric Morgat

Eric Morgat’s Anjou Blanc bottling of Litus is a very strong example of the vintage, but it is a bit more deeply-pitched in personality than his stellar Savennières from 2011. The bouquet is a complex and wide open blend of apple, peach, lanolin, chalky soil tones, orange peel and a bit of esthery bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and already fairly mature, with a good core, sound acids and good length and grip on the finish. This will make good drinking over the next couple of years, but will not be particularly long-lived by the high standards of Loire chenin blanc. 2014-2017. **89**.

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 out from the vintage. However, that said, in the notes that follow, I have used the same approach that I use for white Bordeaux or Burgundy these days, and have given an expected window of drinkability that describes the structure of the wine in its youth and does not take into account the specter of premox. This section of the report would have been far better if fate had been a bit kinder to me, but my travel schedule had me on the road when Pascaline Lepeltier invited me to a big Savennières tasting that I regrettably could not attend here in New York, as I was on the road on the date the tasting was held. I would have loved to have been there and had all of those additional tasting notes to add to the feature, but we will have to be content on four notes and three absolutely superb bottlings of Savennières.

2012 Savennières “La Jalousie”- Domaine du Closel

The 2012 Savennières “La Jalousie” from Domaine du Closel is a very nice bottle of wine that is drinking quite well out of the blocks (which is all to the good) and already offers up noteworthy complexity on both the nose and palate. The wine is quite ripe at 13.5 percent, but offers up a very bright and classic bouquet of apple, quince, incipient notes of honeycomb, citrus peel, chalky soil tones, a bit of lanolin and a faint whiff of charcoal in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a fine core, lovely nascent complexity, good acids and very good length and grip on the quite powerful finish. Good juice that will not have to be cellared before it starts to offer plenty of pleasure, and at its octane level, I suspect it will probably be at its best in its early days. 2014-2025+. **91**.

2012 Savennières “Roche aux Moines”- Domaine aux Moines

I really hit some lovely bottles of Savennières in preparation for this report, and the 2012 Roche aux Moines bottling from Domaine aux Moines was one of the finest I tasted. The deep and complex nose offers up a superb blend of pear, apple, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, a touch of honeycomb, acacia blossoms and a dollop of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and wide open in personality, with a superb core of fruit, crisp

acids and excellent grip on the long, complex and focused finish. This is dynamite Savennières! 2014-2035. **93.**

2011 Savennières “Clos du Papillon”- Domaine du Closel

I think the first vintage of Clos du Papillon that I enjoyed from Domaine du Closel was the superb 1985, so I go back away with this bottling. The last few vintages seem to be a bit more heady than I recall being typical of this wine in the vintages of the 1980s and 1990s, with the 2011 tipping the scales at a full fourteen percent alcohol, and I wonder if this is a function of global warming. In any case, the wine shows its ripeness on the nose of pineapple, honey, lanolin, a fine base of soil, dried flowers and a bit of acetone in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerful, with a rock solid core of fruit, plenty of alcohol, good acids and a long, muscular and focused finish that closes with an overt note of orange rind. Maybe it is just my memory playing tricks, but I seem to remember these wines as far more elegant and less “beef-caked” back in the day, and I liked them a hell of a lot better in their former guise. This is a perfectly solid, ripe and buxom example of Savennières that is well-made, but lacks the breed, complexity and soil signature of the wines made here back in the ‘80s and ‘90s. Every journey is a measure of what has been lost and what has been found. 2014-2020+? **88.**

2011 Savennières “l’Enclos”- Eric Morgat

The 2011 Savennières “l’Enclos” from Eric Morgat is a stellar follow-up to the 2010 version, and this has to be one of the best bottlings of Savennières produced these days. The stunning nose wafts from the glass in a blaze of white peach, apple, chalky, salty soil tones, bee pollen, citrus peel and a bit of lanolin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a great core, superb balance and a very long, complex and racy finish. This is fully fourteen percent alcohol, but is cool in the mouth and absolutely pure and electric on the backend and shows no signs of carrying this octane. A stellar wine. 2017-2035. **94+.**

The Great Red Wine Appellations of the Central Loire

I continue to be more and more impressed with each passing year in the appellations of Saumur-Champigny, Bourgueil and Chinon, and it strikes me as very surprising that more wine lovers who used to drink a lot of Bordeaux (but may have been priced out of the market for their traditional favorites) have not embraced the stunning red wines coming out of the central Loire. This is clearly a region that is a winner in the global warming sweepstakes, at least for now, and the red wines of the central Loire have never been more brilliant than they are today! While the most famous reds of this area are the superb bottlings from Clos Rougeard, the depth and breadth of first class producers in these communes is truly remarkable and the options available to savvy wine fans are really quite impressive. This report does not include notes on new releases from a couple of my absolute favorite estates in the region, Domaine Breton in Bourgueil and Domaine Charles Joguet in Chinon, as the “possible samples” did not make it (yet?) in time for publication of this issue, but there is still a plethora of notes on truly great wines from these three appellations in this feature. Estates such as Domaine Bernard Baudry and Domaine Olga Raffault in Chinon have already become very well-established in the market, and alongside the wines from Clos Rougeard and Domaines Breton and Joguet are amongst the most famous reds of the Loire these days, but there are several other producers whose wines are every bit up to the standards of this same elite club of excellence and really deserve to be a bit

better-known these days. If one takes a fancy to the more oaky style of wines of the very top Clos Rougeard cuvées, Domaine de Pallus in Chinon is another truly outstanding source for great cabernet franc with a bit of new oakiness, and another gently new oaky red from the region just crossed my path (and which was totally new to me) that merits snapping up by aficionados of this style of Loire red is the utterly profound 2009 bottling of Grand Mont from Domaine du Bel Air in Bourgueil, which has just been released into the market. For those who prefer a touch less wood influence in the profiles of their Loire reds, estates like Domaine des Coutures, Domaine Filliatreau and Château Hureau in Saumur are making stellar wines. In Bourgueil, one could easily persuade me that Yannick Amirault is now the top producer in the village (though I do not taste the Domaine Breton wines with anywhere near the same frequency as I did a few years ago, and had to pull a few out of my cellar to make sure the name did not totally disappear from my coverage this time around), as his myriad of different bottlings are consistently amongst the star red Loire wines that I taste every year and I have little doubt that these are amongst the finest wines in the entire Loire for long-term cellaring. In Chinon, beyond the customary firmament of well-known top producers, add the names of Philippe Alliet and Marc Plouzeau at Château de la Bonnelière to the very best sources for great wines in the appellation. The options out there today for superb, cellar-worthy reds from the Loire has never been better, and for the intrepid cellar builder, today is the golden age for the beautifully complex and age-worthy wines of the Loire Valley's great red wine appellations.



Saumur-Champigny

2012 Saumur- Château Fouquet (Domaine Filliatreau)

Happily, the 2012 Château Fouquet is bottled with a natural cork, rather than the plastic cork used for their Grande Vignole bottling. The wine is excellent, offering up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, juniper berries, coffee, gravelly soil tones, a touch of tree bark, cigar smoke and a discreet topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil inflection, excellent focus and just a touch of tannin on the long, complex and very classy finish. This is drinking beautifully out of the blocks, but will be even better with another year or two in the cellar, which will allow its secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. A lovely bottle of Saumur. 2014-2025+. **91.**

2012 Saumur-Champigny “la Grande Vignole”- Domaine Filliatreau (unfiltered)

Domaine Filliatreau’s Grande Vignole is one of my favorite bottlings of Saumur-Champigny, so I was distressed to see this new vintage sealed up with a plastic cork, as I have never had good results aging bottles with this closure. Given that the 2005 Grande Vignole in my cellar is drinking beautifully, I was not excited to see this fine cuvée sealed with a closure that usually demands fairly brisk consumption. In any case, today the 2012 Grande Vignole is a superb bottle, offering up a complex nose of black cherries, dark berries, tree bark, espresso, lovely *tuffeau* soil tones and woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and quite accessible, with a lovely core, superb complexity, moderate and well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused finish. This is a beautiful wine and I hope that there have been technical breakthroughs with plastic corks that I am unaware of, as it would be a pity if this superb bottle aged prematurely because of a faulty closure! 2014-2020+? **92.**

2011 Saumur-Champigny- Domaine des Coutures

I was absolutely in love with the stellar 2009 release from Domaine des Coutures, but the 2011 may be even a tad more serious and certainly is every bit as superb. The utterly classic nose jumps from the glass in a complex blend of sweet dark berries, pomegranate, cigar smoke, tree bark, a beautifully complex base of dark soil tones, fresh herbs, espresso and just a whisper of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, ripe tannins, tangy acids and outstanding focus and grip on the refined and complex finish. Domaine des Coutures has to be one of the great, unheralded producers in the central Loire and this gorgeous vintage of their Saumur-Champigny will age with great style and grace. This is one of the great red wine steals in the wine market today! 2014-2030+. **92+.**

2011 Saumur Puy Notre Dame “le Pied à l’Étrier”- Domaine de l’Enchantoir

The Saumur Puy Notre Dame *appellation* is a relatively new distinction from the remainder of Saumur-Champigny, with the higher elevation and pure limestone soil base here creating wines that the INAO decided were unique enough to warrant their own AOC. The Domaine de l’Enchantoir is owned by Pierre and Brigitte Van den Boom, who only began running their domaine in the same year that the AOC was formed. I had liked very much their 2010 last year and the 2011 is a fine follow-up, offering up a deep and youthfully complex bouquet of dark berries, cassis, cigar smoke, espresso, a fine base of chalky soil tones and a bit of tobacco leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and full-bodied, with a nice sense of sappiness in the rock solid core, fir, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the primary and very well-balanced finish. This is every bit as fine as the 2010 version, but may need a bit longer in the cellar to really start hitting on all cylinders. This is a

domaine for Loire Valley red wine lovers to latch onto today, as the prices are an absolute steal for such high quality wines! 2017-2040. **91+**.

2011 Saumur-Champigny “Tuffe”- Château Hureau

I have been very impressed with the wines of Château Hureau for the last four or five years, but I have a sense that the estate is poised to take their wines up into the very top echelon of red wine producers in the region in the years to come. The 2011 Tuffe bottling is outstanding young Saumur, offering up a deep and youthfully complex bouquet of cassis, woodsmoke, espresso, dark soil, a touch of menthol, gamebirds and just a bit of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and balance, ripe tannins and excellent grip on the very long and promising finish. I would give this outstanding bottle of Saumur-Champigny a couple of years in the cellar to fully blossom, and then drink it with great pleasure over the ensuing twenty years or so. 2016-2035+. **92+**.

2003 Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeaux”- Clos Rougeard

The 2003 les Poyeaux from Clos Rougeard is drinking marvelously well and has to be a candidate for France’s greatest red wine in this vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and blossoming beautifully at age eleven, offering up a fine mélange of black cherries, pomegranate, cigar smoke, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of meatiness, fresh herbs and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core of fruit, stellar freshness and bounce (particularly for the vintage!), moderate tannins and outstanding complexity on the long and very classy finish. There is no signs of the torrid summer of 2003 in this wine, which is an utterly classic expression of this magical Saumur-Champigny bottling. It is just reaching its plateau of maturity, and though it will continue to improve over the coming years, it is already a very, very impressive glass of cabernet franc. 2014-2040. **95**.

Bourgueil and St. Nicolas de Bourgueil

2013 Bourgueil “Jour de Soif”- Domaine du Bel Air (Pierre Gauthier)

The Jour de Soif bottling, is the everyday drinking version of Bourgueil from the talented Pierre Gauthier at Domaine du Bel Air. The wine is raised entirely in stainless steel and crafted for early accessibility, with the 2013 offering up a bright nose of black cherries, dark berries, cigar smoke, a lovely base of soil and a touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and bouncy, with a succulent core, a wide open personality, tangy acids and lovely balance and grip on the impressively serious finish. This is lovely juice and a superb value. 2014-2025. **89**.

2013 Bourgueil “Merci la Vie”- Domaine l’Oubliée (Xavier Courant)

The 2013 Bourgueil “Merci la Vie” bottling from Xavier Courant is very much a reflection of its vintage, as the wine comes in at a cool 10.5 percent alcohol this year. Nevertheless, the color is quite nicely dark and the nose is excellent, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, pomegranate, tree bark, pepper and a superb base of gravelly soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, focused and complex, with nice intensity of flavor, just a touch of tannin and a long, low fat and well-balanced finish. There is not a ton of depth here, but there is fine backend intensity and plenty of complexity. A very stylish middleweight. 2014-2020+. **88**.

2012 Bourgueil “la Coudraye”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

Yannick Amirault is one of the most talented red wine producers in all of the Loire Valley, and his consistent excellence over at least the decade has been surpassed by absolutely

no one in the region. As I have mentioned in the past, his la Coudraye bottling is made of a blend of the three major soil types of Bourgueil- *tuffeau*, gravel and flint, with the wine raised in older *foudres* and bottled unfiltered with an eye towards relatively early drinking. The 2012 la Coudraye is another superb example of this bottling, offering up a nose of dark berries, black cherries, cigar smoke, coffee bean, a touch of tree bark and a lovely base of dark soil nuances. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine-grained tannins, lovely balance and excellent grip on the long and fairly youthful finish. The lower yields of 2012 have produced a la Coudraye that really needs a couple of years in the cellar to blossom fully. Another excellent wine from Monsieur Amirault. 2016-2030+. **90.**

2012 Bourgueil “les Galichets”- Catherine and Pierre Breton

The 2012 single vineyard les Galichets bottling from the Breton family is a superb example of the vintage. As I have noted in the past, this wine hails from an excellent, gravel-based vineyard planted with fifty-six year-old vines, and the 2012 has turned out marvelously well, as it offers up a stylish and nicely high-toned bouquet of dark berries, gravel, cigar ash, juniper berries and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is fullish, nascently complex and quite transparent, with a lovely core of pure fruit, moderate tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and classy finish. The difficult 2012 vintage here has produced a wine of excellent early soil signature, but shows no shortage of depth or ripeness and really is an excellent young bottle of Bourgueil. I would still give it a couple of years to allow it to show more secondary layers of complexity, but it is already quite approachable and tasty today. 2016-2035. **92.**

2011 Bourgueil “les Quartiers” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Yannick Amirault

The 2011 Les Quartiers is another outstanding bottle of Bourgueil, and fully does justice to one of the very top vineyard sites in the appellation. Monsieur Amirault’s parcel of fifty year-old vines in this chalk and clay-based *terroir* is raised in *demi-muids* (twice the size of the standard 228 liter barrel) that have all been previously used, so that the wine sees no new oak during its *elevage*. The 2011 comes in at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a simply stunning young nose of cassis, black cherries, tree bark, a superb signature of soil, cigar smoke and just a whisper of oak from the older *demi-muids*. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very, very refined, with a rock solid core, ripe tannins and superb length and grip on the still quite tightly-knit finish. This will be a terrific wine, but give it four or five years in the cellar to blossom and start to show its secondary layers of complexity. High class juice and a superb value. 2018-2040. **93+.**

2011 Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil “la Mine”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

The Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil “la Mine” bottling from Yannick Amirault is also raised in older *foudres* and bottled unfiltered. The 2011, which I taste a year ago, is a fine bottle that is starting to stir a bit behind its structural elements and really beginning to show outstanding promise and it clearly seems that I underestimated this a bit last fall. The fifty year-old vines here offer up a deep and still fairly youthful nose of sweet cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a bit of tree bark, incipient notes of menthol and just a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe, well-integrated tannins, lovely balance and a very long, nascently complex and chewy finish. It is still very early days for this superb wine, but in another half dozen years or so, it should really start drinking with great style. I should note that this wine is a bit reductive when first opened today, and really benefits from some aeration, if one is predisposed to take a bottle out for a test drive today. 2020-2045+. **93.**

2009 Bourgueil “Grand Mont”- Domaine du Bel Air (Pierre Gauthier)

Grand Mont is one of the very top *terroirs* in all of Bourgueil, but I had never tasted this bottling from Pierre Gauthier until this brilliant 2009 crossed my path this autumn. The wine is barrel-fermented and probably sees about fifteen to twenty percent new wood during its *elevage*, which just adds polish to its profile, while still allowing the superb signature of soil to remain front and center. This beautifully pure and refined wine is stunning on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet soaring from the glass in a magical mélange of black cherries, dark plums, raw cocoa, a touch of tree bark, cigar smoke, gravel and a very discreet touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe, moderate tannins, laser-like focus and stunning length and grip on the complex and very elegant finish. This is a great, great bottle of young Bourgueil! 2016-2045. **95+**.

2005 Bourgueil “Clos Sénéchal”- Catherine et Pierre Breton

It is hard to believe that it has been more than six years since I last tasted a bottle of the Bretons’ 2005 Clos Sénéchal (as I have a fair bit in the cellar and it is not typical of me to show such restraint!), but this was the first bottle that I have pulled since I tasted this superb wine very early on in its evolution. Given the combination of the great structure of the 2005 Loire reds and the superb *terroir* of this vineyard, it is not surprising that the wine is still quite young and several years away from its plateau of maturity, but it is approachable today for those whose curiosity needs to be assuaged. The bouquet is deep and just beginning to show signs of secondary development in its aromatic constellation of cassis, black cherries, tree bark, marvelous dark soil tones, incipient notes of venison and a smoky topnote. There is also just a touch of brett in evidence here, but it is fairly modest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still sweet and solid at the core, with ripe, chewy tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very, very long, complex and still oh so promising finish. At age nine, I was really expecting that the ’05 Clos Sénéchal would be starting to relax a bit more structurally, but this is still a fairly young wine and I am not going to touch another bottle out of my cellar for another six or seven years, as this has so much more to offer with further bottle age. 2020-2060. **94+**.

Chinon Blanc and Rosé

2013 Chinon “Messanges Rosé”- Domaine de Pallus

This is the first example of Chinon Rosé that I have tasted from Domaine de Pallus, and the wine is quite lovely. The bouquet is a complex and succulent mix of white cherries, peach, a superb base of chalky soil tones, a touch of orange peel and dried roses. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and still quite youthfully structured, with an excellent core of fruit, good acids and impressive backend energy on the long and beautifully balanced finish. This is fine juice that will be even better with another year in the bottle. 2014-2020. **89**.

1997 Chinon Blanc “Champ Chenin”- Domaine Olga Raffault

I had never tasted the Chinon Blanc bottling from Domaine Raffault, and I was quite impressed with the quality of both of these older vintages, though not surprisingly, the riper and more highly-touted 1997 vintage has produced a wine that is starting to slide down the far side of the plateau, whereas the cooler, more middling vintage of 1993 is still young, fresh and has years and years to go! The 1997 Champ Chenin is fairly amber in color now and quite honeyed in the bouquet, offering up a very mature and slightly oxidative blend of baked peaches, lanolin, honeycomb, chalky soil and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now getting quite four-square as it starts to decline, but still with some flavor interest and sneaky length on the reasonably bouncy finish. I would opt to serve this with the cheese course now,

where it still does quite nicely, but it is time to drink it up. Not bad though, even in decline. 2014-2016. **86.**

1993 Chinon Blanc “Champ Chenin”- Domaine Olga Raffault

In contrast to the tiring 1997 Champ Chenin, the 1993 Chinon Blanc from Domaine Raffault is just reaching its apogee at age eleven and still has at least another decade of life ahead of it. The color is decidedly lighter than its counterpart from 1997, with a bit of green-gold glints at the edge. The bouquet is a lovely expression of youthful chenin blanc, delivering scents of quince, lime, chalky soil tones, a touch of wet wool, citrus peel and a gentle topnote of beeswax. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and racy, with a rock solid core, superb cut and grip and a very long, vibrant and classy finish. Just starting to drink well, the 1993 Chinon Blanc from Domaine Raffault will continue to delight for many years to come. 2014-2025+. **90.**

Chinon

2013 Chinon “les Granges”- Domaine Bernard Baudry

As I have observed in the past, 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 2013 is quite modest in alcohol, coming in at 11.5 percent, but also a lovely and quite complete wine that is not missing anything at this lower octane. The bouquet is a youthfully complex constellation of dark berries, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil, a bit of charred wood, menthol and a touch of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and well-balanced, with a moderate core, just a touch of tannin, fine acids and very good length and grip on the poised and still fairly primary finish. This is certainly approachable today, but it will be even better with a year or two in the cellar. A very fine middleweight. 2014-2020+. **88.**

2013 Chinon “Messanges Rouge”- Domaine de Pallus

The Messanges Rouge bottling from Domaine de Pallus is a new cuvée that is designed for immediate drinking and seeks to capture the bounce and succulent generosity of young cabernet franc. The 2013 tips the scales at 12.5 percent and offers up a bright and stylish nose of cherries, juniper berries, coffee, a fine base of soil, a touch of menthol and fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, vibrant and complex, with a good core, fine focus and balance and just a bit of tannin perking up the long and tangy finish. This will be even better a year down the road, but it is already a very tasty glass of lighter-styled Chinon, with plenty of personality and the potential to get even better with a bit more bottle age. 2014-2025+. **89.**

2012 Chinon- Domaine Philippe Alliet

Philippe Alliet’s 2012 regular bottling of Chinon is a lovely and quite typical example of the vintage, with only moderate ripeness, which gives the wine a bit of a vegetal aspect when it is first opened, but which quickly is subsumed in the other fine aromatic elements in the wine. The bouquet is deep, complex and just a whisper underripe in its mix of dark berries, tree bark, woodsmoke, gravelly soil tones, cigar ash and lovely botanicals that recall Chartreuse. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with a fine core of fruit, firm tannins, lovely textural sophistication and very good length and grip on the long, soil-driven and still quite primary finish. While this wine is approachable today, it really deserves a year or two in the cellar to soften up more fully, but it is going to be a lovely wine in the fullness of time and age long and gracefully. A fine result in 2012. 2016-2035+. **90.**

2012 Chinon “les Grézeaux”- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The 2012 les Grézeaux bottling from Mathieu Baudry is a fine example of the vintage, with its cooler fruit profile based in its 12.5 percent octane. The bouquet is youthfully complex and quite impressive, wafting from the glass in a blend of dark berries, cassis, tree bark, a touch of chicory, dark soil tones, espresso and just a touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and balance, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and soil-driven personality. This is really a terrific example of the vintage! 2018-2040. **93.**

2012 Chinon “les Cornuelles”- Château de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)

As I noted last year, when reviewing the 2010 Cornuelles, Monsieur Plouzeau has a fine parcel of fifty year-old vines in this excellent *terroir* and the wine is aged in four and five year-old, 450 liter barrels. The 2012 Cornuelles is a lovely follow-up to the 2010, offering up a fine and quite youthful bouquet of dark berries, gravelly soil tones, cigar ash, a touch of tree bark, gentle meaty tones, espresso and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nicely structured and quite soil-driven in personality, with a lovely core, moderate, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and very promising finish. This is a very good example of how the low yields of 2012 have not adversely affected the overall quality of the wines, just the quantity, and this may well outpace the fine 2010 Cornuelles from Marc Plouzeau in the years to come! Fine, fine juice. 2018-2040. **93+.**

2012 Les Pensées de Pallus Chinon

The 2012 Les Pensées de Pallus Chinon from Bertrand Sourdais is really a terrific example of the vintage, tipping the scales at a cool 12.5 percent and offering up an excellent bouquet of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, a touch of tree bark and a faint whiff of oak around the edges. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and really drinking beautifully out of the blocks, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent focus and grip, quite moderate tannins and outstanding length on the pure and utterly classic finish. This is very stylish Chinon that will delight early on, but will be better with a year or two in the cellar and clearly has the balance and stuffing to age effortlessly for at least the next ten to twelve years. High class juice! 2015-2030. **90.**

2012 Chinon “les Barnabés”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The 2012 Chinon “les Barnabés” from Domaine Olga Raffault is a lovely bottle of wine, with nice ripeness of 12.5 percent that translates into fine balance, good structure and impressive signature of soil. The classic nose is a youthful blend of cassis, tree bark, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a bit of meatiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and beautifully balanced, with sound depth at the core, moderate tannins and fine complexity on the long, primary and very classy finish. Like all of the Raffault bottlings of Chinon, this wine will get even better with a bit of bottle age. Fine juice. 2014-2030+. **89+.**

2011 Chinon- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The 2011 regular bottling from Mathieu Baudry is an outstanding bottle of Chinon that is starting to blossom and drink very well, but has the depth and structure to also age very gracefully as well. The excellent and very classic nose wafts from the glass in a mix of cassis, black cherries, tree bark, dark soil tones, just a whisper of menthol and cigar smoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with an excellent core of fruit, moderate, ripe tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, balanced and very classy finish. This is a superb bottle of Chinon and an absolutely stellar value! 2014-2035+. **92+.**

2011 Chinon “les Clos”- Château de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)

This is the first vintage of les Clos that I can recall tasting from Marc Plouzeau. This is a far more chalky *terroir* than les Cornuelles, which has more clay and produces a more robust and meaty wine as a result, and the 2011 les Clos shows the inherent refinement that this vineyard can produce in a top *vigneron*'s hands. The bouquet is simply beautiful, wafting from the glass in a blend of dark berries, coffee bean, sweet black cherries, a very complex base of soil and a topnote of cigar ash. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core, excellent focus and balance, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the still quite structured finish. This will be a lovely wine with a bit more bottle age. 2018-2035+. **93.**

2011 Chinon “Bonnaventure”- Château de Coulaine

The 2011 Chinon “Bonnaventure” bottling from Château de Coulaine is a fine follow-up to their lovely 2010 version, with the wine jumping from the glass in a suave and classy aromatic constellation of cassis, sweet dark berries, cigar smoke, a touch of tree bark, hints of coffee bean and just a hint of cedary wood (despite the wine spending its entire *elevage* in six thousand liter, old oak vats prior to bottling). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with an excellent core of fruit, a nice backbone of ripe tannin, good acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long, complex and gently chewy finish. This is an absolutely superb bottle of Chinon, and while it is certainly approachable today, I would opt for giving it another year or two in the cellar to let the tannins fully soften and the wine really start to drink with generosity. Excellent juice. 2016-2035. **92.**



2011 Les Pensées de Pallus Chinon

Bertrand Sourdais' 2011 Les Pensées de Pallus Chinon is the same octane level as the 2012 version (12.5 percent), but I get the sense that this is even a touch riper than the more recent release and, ultimately, a slightly more complete wine. The outstanding bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of dark berries, cassis, French roast, a hint of tree bark, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit more structured than the 2012, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, well-measured tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused and very promising finish. This needs a few more years in the cellar than the 2012 to fully blossom, but it should end up nosing out its younger sibling with sufficient bottle age. 2017-2030+. **91+**.

2011 Grand Vin de Pallus Chinon

The Grand Vin de Pallus is the top cuvée from Domaine de Pallus and the 2011 version is a fine follow-up to their outstanding 2010. As I noted last year, this bottling is aged entirely of new oak for eighteen months and it is my impression that it looks to the top bottlings from Clos Rougeard in Saumur for its inspiration. The 2011 is a very fine young bottle of Chinon, offering up a fine and nascently complex bouquet of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones and a fair bit of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and beautifully balanced, with a sweet core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, slightly oaky finish. The balance here is very good, but the wine is still young and needs a couple of years to fully absorb its oak component, but there is little doubt that the stuffing here will carry the wood quite well in the fullness of time and this will be an outstanding wine with some bottle age. 2019-2035+. **92+**.

2010 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The 2010 vintage of les Picasses from the Raffault family is an excellent and classically structured young bottle of Chinon that perfectly captures the potential of this excellent *terroir* in a top flight vintage. The youthfully complex nose wafts from the glass in a blend of sweet dark berries, cassis, cigar smoke, a touch of balsam bough, gravelly soil tones and a bit of juniper berry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with outstanding transparency, ripe, well-integrated tannins, good acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, soil-driven and nascently complex finish. This is still a fairly youthful wine, but it is so beautifully balanced, that it is quite drinkable in its infancy, though it really deserves at least four or five years in the cellar to unleash its secondary layers of complexity and emerge fully from behind its moderate tannins. A beautiful and very refined young Chinon. 2017-2040+. **93**.

2006 Chinon- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The Baudry family makes classically sturdy and long-lived Chinons, and their 2006 regular bottling is just starting to enter a nice plateau for drinking, though the wine still has a bit of backend tannin and will continue to blossom with even a bit more bottle age. The bouquet is deep, complex and really quite classy in its mélange of cassis, dark berries, tree bark, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a bit of high-end horsiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with excellent concentration at the core, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and classic finish. Fine juice. 2014-2030+. **90**.

2005 Chinon “les Varennes du Grand Clos” Franc de Pied- Domaine Charles Joguet

I know that 2005 is the superior vintage for Chinon, and this '05 “Cabernet Franc de Pied” from Domaine Joguet is going to be stunning in the fullness of time, but I do not know if I will ever love it more than the decidedly cooler 2004 version! This wine is fully 13.5 percent alcohol (versus 12.5 for the 2004) and while it shows no signs of overripeness or heat on the palate, I wonder if it will ever revel in its *terroir* the way its older sibling does at the moment. The bouquet offers up a superb, youthful and sappy blend of black cherries, sweet cassis, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke and a touch of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a quite soil-driven personality, but also with a strong sense of the vintage's ripeness on the backend. The wine remains ripely tannic and still too young for primetime drinking, and though it is impeccably balanced, it is a wine that is as reflective of its vintage as it is of its *terroir*- at least for the foreseeable future. I love this wine and am happy to still have eleven more bottles in the cellar to follow down the road, but I will not be opening another bottle for several years, as this wine still needs hibernation time. 2018-2040+. **93+**.

2004 Chinon “les Varennes du Grand Clos” Franc de Pied- Domaine Charles Joguet

I bought a case of the 2004 Franc de Pied from Domaine Joguet and have been checking in on it once a year for a few years now, but it is only as the wine has reached its tenth birthday that it seems to really have reached the start of its prime window of drinkability and show some overt generosity. Today the wine offers up an excellent bouquet of cassis, cigar smoke, bell pepper, a touch of eucalyptus, gravelly soil tones, espresso and a bit of charred wood in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and now nicely blossomed, with a fine core of fruit, the inimitable soil signature of *Franc de Pied*, melting tannins and a very long, focused and tangy finish. I have always liked the cooler 2004 vintage for its purity and transparency, and though it is not probably quite in the same league as the subsequent years of 2005 or 2006 for central Loire cabernet franc, there is an awful lot of pleasure to be had in this vintage from top bottlings such as the Joguet Cabernet Franc de Pied. 2014-2025+. **93**.

Vouvray

2013 Vouvray “la Coulée d’Argent” Sec- Domaine Bourillon d’Orléans

The 2013 Vouvray Sec from Domaine Bourillon d’Orléans is quite a nice wine, particularly considering how difficult the 2013 vintage was in the Touraine, with another brutal series of hailstorms. The wine offers up a pretty and quite complex nose of quince, apple, lanolin, white flowers and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, wide open and nicely balanced, with good, but not great depth at the core, nice framing acids and very good length and grip on the complex and quite succulent finish. This will not make old bones, but it is a clean and classy middleweight and a notable success for the vintage. 2014-2020. **87+**.

2013 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2013 Le Haut Lieu Sec from Domaine Huët is quite low octane, coming in at twelve percent alcohol, and it is fairly forward for this bottling. The bouquet is a fine, classic and quite wide open blend of quince, apple, a touch of lanolin, dried flowers, citrus peel, just a whisper of honeycomb and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and quite nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, sound framing acids, lovely backend intensity and a long, complex finish. This does not have the cut or quite the dimension of top flight year of this bottling, but it is an outstanding effort for the 2013 vintage and should age quite nicely for at

least the next dozen years, and may prove to be significantly longer-lived than that. Good juice and a yeoman's effort for 2013! 2014-2030. **89+.**

2013 Vouvray "Le Mont" Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2013 Le Mont Sec from Domaine Huët is a bit riper than the Le Haut Lieu Sec in this vintage, coming in at its customary thirteen percent alcohol, and the wine is a bit richer and longer as a result, though it too is a quite forward vintage for this bottling. The deep and complex nose offers up scents of pineapple, lanolin, lovely soil tones, incipient notes of honeycomb, a touch of tangerine and a bit of wet wool. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a touch of backend tannin that adds grip and gravitas on the long finish. This is not a classic vintage of Le Mont Sec, as it is a bit deeper-pitched than usual, but it has come out very, very well indeed and I really like the personality that this wine displays right out of the blocks. Good juice. 2014-2020+? **90.**

2013 Vouvray "Clos du Bourg" Sec- Domaine Huët

Domaine Huët's 2013 Clos du Bourg Sec shares a slightly higher octane with the Le Mont this year, coming in at an even thirteen percent, and the wine offers up a more youthful profile than either of the other two Sec bottlings this year from the estate. The fairly reticent nose is deep and potentially complex, offering up scents of quince, lemon, a touch of bee pollen, lanolin, a beautifully complex base of soil, orange peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a superb core of fruit, a still fairly primary profile, sound acids, lovely focus and grip and again, a bit of backend tannin in evidence out of the blocks on the very long finish, which will probably make this one of the longest-lived Vouvrais of the vintage. Once again, this is not a typical vintage of Clos du Bourg Sec, but the wine has really turned out well and transcends the vagaries of the vintage. I would give this at least a year in the cellar to let it start to show its secondary layers of complexity. 2015-2025+. **92.**

2012 Vouvray "la Bourdonnerie" Demi-Sec- Domaine Bourillon d'Orléans

The 2012 Vouvray "la Bourdonnerie" Demi-Sec from Domaine Bourillon d'Orléans is sealed up with a plastic cork, which is never a great thing for the long haul, but today the wine is fresh and shows no signs of advancement. The bouquet is a pretty and floral blend of sweet quince, apple, chalky soil tones, bee pollen, a touch of lanolin and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, succulent and wide open, with a good core, nice complexity, a fair bit of sweetness for a Demi-Sec and solid framing acids on the long, laid back and stylish finish. This is not the most structured or serious example of Vouvray, but it does offer up a lot of personality and is quite tasty for drinking today. It's fine sense of balance would augur well for aging as well, at least over the medium term, but with its plastic cork, I would be inclined to drink it on the earlier side. Good juice. 2014-2017+? **88.**

2011 Vouvray Sec- Domaine François Pinon

The 2011 Vouvray Sec from François Pinon is a very good bottle of wine that seems a bit shut down at the present time and probably would be willing to be left alone in a cool corner of the cellar for a couple more years. The bouquet is a classic blend of quince, lanolin, a touch of orange peel, lovely soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a tightly-knit structure, lovely acids and focus, nascent complexity and a long, balanced and still quite reticent finish. This is not a bad drink today, but it is so obviously coiled to spring with further bottle age, and it is really a shame to be pulling

corks on bottles right now, as this wine is going to be absolutely stellar with a bit more bottle age. 2018-2040+. **93+**.

2007 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Moelleux- Domaine Huët

The 2007 vintage was rather inconsistent throughout the Loire Valley, but the one sweet spot of the year were the later harvested chenin blanc-based wines, as September and October had excellent weather for the formation of botrytis. The 2007 Clos du Bourg shows plenty of noble rot character in its deep and complex nose of peach, sweet quince, honeycomb, orange blossoms, lovely soil tones, a bit of lanolin and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and vibrant, with a great core, lovely, nascent complexity and a very long, focused and beautifully balanced finish. The heavy botrytis character of this wine suggests it will age along the lines of the 1990 Moelleux wines from Domaine Huët, rather than some of the other recent top sweet wine vintages, which achieved some of their concentration from desiccated berries, as well as noble rot. This is a lovely wine in the making, and at age seven, it is still a puppy. 2014-2060+. **94**.

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

It seems rather amazing to me that I just wrote up this magical wine a year ago, and yet crossed paths with another bottle only this past September. Given that the wine was served at Joe Dougherty’s memorial tasting, it seems fitting to write another note on the wine, even though it has not changed a bit in the last twelve months and every bit as magical today as it was then. The 1959 Le Mont Moelleux Première Trie is a breathtakingly brilliant wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet a stunning blend of apricot, raspberry, barley sugar, marvelously complex, gently chalky soil tones, leather and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and not particularly sweet for a Première Trie, as the residual sugars seem to be transforming into other elements in the wine. The wine is rock solid at the core, crisp and laser-like in its focus, with brilliant complexity, length and grip on the pure and dancing finish. A gorgeous wine and a very fitting tribute to Monsieur Dougherty, whose passion for the wines of Domaine Huët was unsurpassed. 2014-2050+. **97**.

1945 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Moelleux Première Trie - Domaine Huët

Given the herculean efforts of Gaston Huët and his family during the end of the Second World War, when Monsieur Huët had to walk all the way across France from the German border to return home to Vouvray, I find it simply amazing how brilliant this wine turned out and humbled by the fact that I have been fortunate enough to taste it on a few occasions. This most recent bottle was simply profound, offering up an utterly brilliant and timeless aromatic constellation of apricot, orange, heather, honey, lavender, white cherries, a bit of new leather and barley sugar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly seamless, with bottomless depth, dazzling complexity, great focus and grip and a magically long, pure and perfectly balanced finish. The acids here remain very vibrant and perfectly integrated and this absolutely perfect wine still has decades and decades of life still ahead of it and will easily pass the century mark with all of its faculties and charms. It had been seven years since I last was able to taste the 1945 Le Haut Lieu Première Trie and it seems that time simply has not touched it since the last tasting. This has to be one of the greatest wines France has ever produced. 2014-2060+. **100**.

1924 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Moelleux - Domaine Huët

I had been fortunate to taste this wine on two previous occasions in the last decade, and it will always stand out in my mind as one of the most brilliant wines I have ever had the pleasure to drink. Until this bottle, which was sealed up with a Champagne basket to keep the cork intact

in the neck of the bottle, I was unaware that the domaine had re-corked some of these bottles in the cellars and had a problem with their adjusted sulfur levels after the re-corking, so that some examples began to ferment again on the considerable residual sugar that the wine has retained and pushed their corks. Once the team understood this, they quickly slapped Champagne baskets around the remaining bottles in the cellar to keep them sealed, but apparently, there are bottles out there of the 1924 Le Haut Lieu Moelleux that are now gently sparkling! In any event, our bottle had not started any re-fermentation and was absolutely pristine, offering up a beautiful nose of orange, passion fruit, heather, dried flowers, rhubarb, beautiful soil tones, clover and a touch of new leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and laser-like in its focus, with a great core, stunning complexity and amazingly, a tinge of youth still in evidence here on the backend, as the wine seems almost a touch tannic! The finish is perfectly balanced and endless. A brilliant wine. 2014-2040+. 97.



1921 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Moelleux - Domaine Huët

I had only tasted the 1921 Domaine Huët Le Haut Lieu Moelleux on one previous occasion, back in 2009, and at that time, the wine had been decanted for a fairly long time prior to serving and perhaps had faded just a bit. This particular bottle was served soon after it was opened and was simply singing. The color is not particularly dark for a Vouvray of this age, with a more orangey-amber tone than the last example I tasted, and the bouquet is still fresh and vibrant in its mélange of apricot, orange peel, baked raspberries, barley sugar, a beautiful base of

complex soil tones, lavender, gentle savory elements and leather. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and oh, so complex, with marvelous depth at the core, gorgeous balance and grip, zesty acids and brilliant length and grip on the dancing and endless finish. As is the case with the 1924 Le Haut Lieu Moelleux noted above, this wine predates the formation of Domaine Huët in 1928 and was produced by the previous owner of Le Haut Lieu, but acquired by the Huët family as part of the purchase of the vineyard and cellars and is a marvelous testimony to the brilliance of this great *terroir*. This timeless wine still has miles and miles to go before it lays down to sleep. 2014-2050. **96.**

White Wines of the Touraine and Côteaux du Loir

2013 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc- Clos Roche Blanche

The 2013 Sauvignon Blanc from Clos Roche Blanche is another very lovely bottle from this consistently excellent cuvée, with the alcohol level reported as 12.5 percent, which is quite robust by the standards of the vintage. The classic nose wafts from the glass in a mix of gooseberry, grassy tones, chalky soil, a bit of straw and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and juicy on the attack, with a good core, sound framing acids, a wide open personality and good length on the slightly more grassy than usual finish. Long-time fans of this bottling might expect just a touch more cut and grip on the backend than the 2013 can deliver, but in the context of the vintage, this is outstanding. 2014-2015. **87.**

2013 Algotest- Olivier Lemasson

The 2013 Algotest from Olivier Lemasson is a new bottling from this former sommelier, comprised of a very rare parcel of old vine Aligoté, planted back in 1952, blended in with a bit of Riesling. The 2013 comes in at a robust eleven percent alcohol and offers up a deep and discreet nose of bread fruit, wet stones, a bit of candied lime peel and a touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and nicely transparent, with respectable depth at the core, sound framing acids and sneaky length on the straightforward finish. Not bad for the vintage, I will look forward to seeing what these old vines can do in a more user-friendly vintage. 2014-2015. **87.**

2013 Bois Sans Soif- Olivier Lemasson

The 2013 Bois Sans Soif from Olivier Lemasson is comprised of a fifty-fifty blend of Chenin Blanc and Menu Pineau that tips the scales at a cool eleven percent alcohol in this vintage. The wine offers up a bright bouquet of tart pear, pink grapefruit, a lovely base of soil tones, a touch of straw and just a whisper of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and quite minerally in personality, with fine focus and grip, lovely balance and a long, low fat, but impressively intense finish. This is made for early drinking, but over the next year or two, this will offer plenty of enjoyment in the glass. 2014-2016. **88.**

2013 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc- Puzelat-Bonhomme

The 2013 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc from Thierry Puzelat and Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme is a typical 2013, coming in at a nice, low octane of 11.5 percent alcohol and offering up surprising aromatic and flavor dimension for its modest alcohol level. The bouquet is a vibrant blend of gooseberry, lime, damp grass and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, reasonably crisp and succulent, with a good core, lovely soil signature and a long, complex finish that closes with a bit of citrus peel. Good, solid sauvignon blanc that is long on personality and short on expense- a fine combination. 2014-2015. **87.**

2013 Sauvignon Blanc- Hervé Villemade

The 2013 Sauvignon Blanc from Hervé Villemade is a rather idiosyncratic example of the vintage, as it has pretty good ripeness for the year, coming in at twelve percent alcohol, but is fairly deeply-pitched on the nose and a bit dominated by its damp grass component. The bouquet is a mix of the aforementioned damp grass, yellow plum, petrol, green orange and soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and surprisingly fresher than what the nose might suggest, with a good core, sound acids and very good focus and grip on the complex and quite long finish. When I first put my nose in the glass of this wine, I thought it was not going to be up to the usual high standards of Monsieur Villemade, but the wine is really very impressive on the palate and the rather unique nose is not unattractive in the least and grows on one as the bottle level goes down. A rather singular, but quite successful wine from this tough vintage. 2014-2015. **87.**

2013 L'Effraie Coteaux-du-Loir- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)

The 2013 L'Effraie from Domaine de Bellivière is produced from a handful of parcels of younger vine chenin blanc in several villages (some of which are not entitled to the Jasnières AOC), which is why this superb wine is only entitled to the Coteaux-du-Loir appellation. As to vine age, Monsieur Nicolas simply notes that they are all under fifty years of age, which are young vines in his universe! The wine is barrel-fermented, primarily in older barrels, but a touch of new wood is used in the rotation for this bottling as well. The 2013 L'Effraie is pretty ripe for a 2013 wine, coming in at an even twelve percent octane and offers up a lovely and classic nose of quince, tangerine, bee pollen, chalky soil tones, a touch of lanolin and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the pure and complex finish. As I have noted in the past, Eric Nicolas is simply one of the most talented winegrowers in the entire Loire Valley, and this is readily evident in this beautiful 2013 L'Effraie bottling! 2014-2023+. **91.**

2013 Jasnières “les Rosiers”- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)

The les Rosiers bottling of Jasnières from Domaine de Bellivière is produced younger vines by Monsieur Nicolas and is designed for earlier drinking. The wine is very much a product of its vintage, with a more deeply-pitched nose than usual, but with a wide open personality that offers up pretty good drinking right out of the blocks. The bouquet is a mix of peach, fresh apricot, chalky soil tones, a bit of lanolin and a touch of new leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and round on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, lovely complexity, sound framing acids and very good length on the succulent finish. This does not have its customary backend grip, but it has depth and balance and is really a lovely drink right out of the blocks. 2014-2018. **88.**

2013 Jasnières “Prémices”- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)

Eric Nicolas is one of the most talented winegrowers in the Loire Valley, or more correctly, the Côteaux du Loir, and his 2013 Jasnières “Prémices” is a fascinating example of the vintage. At 11.5 percent alcohol, clearly ripeness was at a premium here in 2013, but the wine is aromatically very fine and seems likely to blossom from behind its zippy palate structure with a bit of bottle age. The classic bouquet offers up a “cool” fruit blend of tart pear, lemon, beeswax, chalk dusty soil tones, lanolin and white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, nascently complex and plenty snappy, with great soil signature, bracing acids, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, very youthful finish. This wine has all of the constituent components in place to be a superb wine with some bottle age, but at 11.5 percent, it does not have the luxury of a lot of buffering fruit out of the blocks to carry the acids, and it will

need some time in the cellar to allow the snappiness to dissipate a bit more. But, give this wine sufficient time in the cellar and it will be excellent. 2017-2035+. **90.**

2012 Existe en Blanc- Domaine l'Oubliée (Xavier Courant)

As I noted last year in the note on the 2011 version, this is not officially a 2012 vintage wine, as I am chenin blanc in the regions of Bourgueil is not an AOC wine, so the vintage is indicated by a code of "Lchenin12" on the side of the label. The wine is grown in a combination of clay and silex soils and is really terrific in the 2012 vintage, whether or not *Les Officials* recognize it as such! The vibrant and complex bouquet soars from the glass in a blend of pear, quince, lanolin, beautiful soil tones, white flowers and just a touch of incipient honeycomb. On the palate the wine is complex, full-bodied and zesty, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, crisp acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and very well-balanced finish. This does not have quite the core of a Vouvray Sec, but it offers loads of complexity and very impressive backend energy on the finish. Fine juice. 2014-2019. **90.**

2012 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc- Clos Roche Blanche

The 2012 Clos Roche Blanche Sauvignon Blanc is drinking beautifully today and shows lovely cut, complexity and breed on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a bright blend of gooseberry, lime peel, cut grass, chalky soil tones and a gentle topnote of white pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, crisp and classy, with a good core and loads of personality on the long and zesty finish. A lovely bottle. 2014-2019. **89.**

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

2013 Vin Rouge- Clos du Tue-Boeuf

The Puzelat Brothers, who run the family estate of Clos de Tue-Boeuf, seem to be in constant struggle with *Les Officials*, as it seems that every vintage finds one or two wines that are rejected by the INAO and not given the appellation. I assume that this is where this lovely, middleweight "Vin Rouge" came from, as the wine's cool octane of ten percent is probably under what is expected of AOC wine from Cheverny. In any event, the wine is really quite lovely, offering up a bit of bottle spritz that needs to blow off in decanter, to go along with a bright and complex nose of red berries, tree bark, balsam boughs, a fine signature of soil and just a hint of spiced meats in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, vibrant and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine focus and balance and just a bit of backend tannin adding grip to the long finish. This is really a lovely wine, and I am hard-pressed to think what could have been added here by pushing the ripeness up to twelve or thirteen percent! 2014-2020+. **89.**

2013 Poivre et Sel- Olivier Lemasson

As I noted last year, 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 2013 is another of the very lightweight wines of this vintage, coming in at a mere eleven percent alcohol, but the wine is missing nothing and is a delicious middleweight. The complex bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of dark berries, a touch of tree bark, espresso, lovely soil tones, acorns and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and shows superb flavor intensity, excellent focus and balance, tangy acids, just a whisper of tannin and excellent length and grip on the soil-driven and classy finish. This wine has amazing amplitude for an eleven percent wine and is really an outstanding effort for this tough vintage. 2014-2024. **90.**

2013 La Boudinerie Gamay- Noëlla Morantin

The 2013 La Boudinerie Gamay from Noëlla Morantin is another lighter red from this low octane vintage in the Loire, with the wine tipping the scales at a cool 11.5 percent alcohol. The wine is quite light in color, but quite expressive on the nose, as it jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of cherries, strawberries, woodsmoke, pepper and herb tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, tangy and complex, with excellent intensity of flavor, plenty of acidity and a very long, balanced and transparent finish. There is a bit of spritz when this wine is first opened, which needs to blow off, but once it does, this is really a wonderfully lithe and tangy middleweight. Very impressive for the vintage! 2014-2019. **89.**

2013 Touraine Pinot Noir- Puzelat-Bonhomme

This bottling is one of the fine *négociant* offerings from Thierry Puzelat and Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme, with the wine tipping the scales at 11.5 percent alcohol in the 2013 vintage. The color is fairly pale, and the bouquet is pretty youthful in its mix of cherries, chicory, woodsmoke, herb tones and dark soil. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and slightly tannic, with modest depth at the core, lovely transparency and a long, low fat and intensely flavored finish. This is a wine of quite modest ripeness, and it will need a bit of time to soften up its tannins, but the wine has lots of personality and my gut feeling is that the balance here is just fine and with a year's worth of bottle age, it should be a very tasty middleweight. But, it is a decidedly a wine of quite modest ripeness, and it may be a bit thin for some folks. 2015-2020+. **87+.**

Le Telquel- Puzelat-Bonhomme

I am assuming that the new release of Le Telquel from Messieurs Puzelat and Bonhomme is from the 2013 vintage, but there is nothing to state this unequivocally on the label. The wine is a blend of Grolleau, Gamay and Pineau d'Aunis, and its eleven percent octane level strongly suggests that this is a wine from the 2013 vintage. The color is actually quite a nice dark color for the vintage and the wine wafts from the glass in a classy bouquet of black cherries, sweet cassis, cola, a nice base of soil, fresh thyme and a bit of violet. On the palate the wine is medium-fullish, focused and complex, with a nice little core of fruit, fine acids and a surprisingly sturdy spine of tannin that needs a year or two in the cellar to relax. The finish is long and the wine shows fine potential, but I would tuck it away for at least a year of bottle age to allow the tannins to soften up a bit and for the wine to start drinking with a bit more generosity. It is a very strong effort for the vintage. 2015-2022. **90.**

R-13- Olivier Lemasson

Olivier Lemasson's R-13 is comprised of a blend of fifty percent grolleau (from seventy-plus year-old vines), thirty percent gamay and twenty percent malbec, with this vintage coming in at an even eleven percent alcohol. The color is fairly dark for the vintage, and the vibrant bouquet is a mix of dark berries, tree bark, dark soil tones, a bit of balsam bough and fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, focused and intensely flavored, with a good core, excellent focus and bounce, just a whisper of tannin and lovely grip on the long and very well-balanced finish. Fine juice. 2014-2022. **89+.**

2013 Gama Sutra- Olivier Lemasson

As I have noted in past issues, 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. The 2013 version tips the scales at eleven percent alcohol and is quite pale in color, but the wine offers plenty of flavor intensity and complexity for its low octane. The bouquet needs a bit of air to blossom, but eventually offers up scents of dark berries, charred wood,

complex soil tones, a bit of chicory and a whiff of dried oak leaves in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and nicely balanced, with fine intensity of flavor, tangy acids, just a bit of tannin and fine length and grip on the focused and bouncy finish. This is really a very successful example of the vintage. 2014-2020. **89.**

2013 Clos Roche Blanche “Cuvée Pif”

The 2013 version of Clos Roche Blanche’s “Cuvée Pif” (a malbec and cabernet franc composition) is really excellent in this vintage, with its twelve percent octane level allowing the wine to revel in its *terroir* and precise fruit tones. The excellent bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex mélange of sweet dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, pepper, espresso and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-focused and still quite youthfully structured, with a fine core of fruit, firm, chewy tannins, excellent balance and a long, primary and soil-driven finish. This needs at least a couple of years to soften, but should prove to be a lovely wine in the fullness of time. 2017-2027. **88+.**

Lucky ‘Lot HA-04’- Natalie Gaubicher et Christian Chaussard

The “Lucky” cuvée from Natalie Gaubicher and Christian Chaussard is one hundred percent pinot d’aunis, and it is pretty ripe if it is indeed from the 2013 vintage, coming in at a full 12.5 percent alcohol, but as it only has a lot number, I am not sure precisely which vintage from which this wine hails. In any event, the color is fairly dark and the wine is acorns outstanding, as it offers up a lovely nose of black cherries, espresso, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, herbs and chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and still youthfully chewy, with a good core, excellent soil signature, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the moderately tannic finish. This is certainly drinkable out of the blocks, but it will be even better with a couple of years’ worth of bottle age to allow the tannins to fall away a bit. With this type of structure, I have to believe that this is indeed from the 2013 vintage. Good juice. 2015-2025. **89+.**

2013 La Butte Touraine Rouge- Clos de Tue-Boeuf

The La Butte bottling from the Puzelat brothers is made up entirely of gamay, with some of the fruit purchased and some from the estate’s own vineyards. The 2013 version is low octane, tipping the scales at a hefty eleven percent alcohol, but the wine is long on both aromatic and flavor complexity. The bouquet is bright and complex, jumping from the glass in a mix of pomegranate, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones, a bit of acorn and a bit of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure and transparent, with a bit of tannin, modest acids, but fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. There is not a lot in reserve here at the core, so I would be inclined to drink this on the early side, despite its touch of backend tannin, as it is really quite tasty, with lots of personality for such a low fat wine. Good juice for those who are fans of middleweight and transparent reds. 2014-2018. **88.**

Les Longues Vignes- Nathalie Gaubicher et Christian Chaussard “Lot LV12”

I assume that the Lot number here indicates that this wine is from the 2012 vintage, and its heady ripeness level of 12.5 percent probably indicates pretty solidly that it is not from 2013! I could find no information about what grape the wine is made from on the importer’s website, but I am guessing Pinot d’Aunis from the region of Jasnières, as this is the appellation from which their white Clos des Longues Vignes hails. In any event, the bouquet is young and still fairly reluctant to offer up a lot of nuance, but with some prompting, delivers a mix of dark berries, coffee grounds, dark soil tones, a bit of chicory and woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and fairly youthful, with some firm tannins, a bit of bracing acid, fine focus and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex and promising

finish. I really like the balance here, but this wine does need a couple of years to blossom, as it is still a bit young for primetime drinking. 2016-2022+. **88.**

Red Wines of the Touraine- Primarily Côt

“Enjoy” Malbec “Lot HA-04”- Nathalie Gaubicher et Christian Chaussard

The current release of the “Enjoy” Malbec “Lot HA-04” from Nathalie Gaubicher et Christian Chaussard is nicely ripe at 12.5 percent alcohol and the wine offers up a lovely bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, pepper, a bit of woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and complex, with lovely intensity of flavor, good acids, a touch of backend tannin and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Based on the structural balance of this wine, I would assume that it is from the 2013 vintage and is a very good effort for the year. 2014-2019. **88.**

2013 Touraine Rouge “La Guerrerie”- Clos du Tue-Boeuf

The 2013 La Guerrerie bottling from Clos du Tue-Boeuf, which readers will recall is made up of seventy percent côt (malbec) and thirty percent gamay, is only eleven percent alcohol, but is quite a bit darker in color than the 2011 version was, which shared a similar octane level. The 2013 offers up an excellent bouquet of cassis, coffee bean, chicory, a touch of tree bark, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and soil-driven, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, just a bit of tannin and excellent intensity of flavor on the long and vibrant finish. This is excellent. 2014-2024. **90.**

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 are given their 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.

2013 Cheverny “le Petit Chambord”- Domaine François Cazin

The 2013 Cheverny “le Petit Chambord” from François Cazin is another of the light on its feet, low octane Loire offerings that are so pervasive in this vintage, as it comes in at a cool 11.5 percent alcohol. The wine wafts from the glass in a very pretty nose of lime, lemon, chalky soil tones, beeswax and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and soil-driven, with modest mid-palate depth, but lovely balance and focus, good acidity and plenty of complexity on the long finish. There is very good intensity of flavor here, if not outright concentration, and this wine is really quite lovely and complete at its lower alcohol level. Just do not serve it too cold, as it does come across as a touch dilute if straight out of the refrigerator, though as it comes up to proper temperature, the wine’s dimension expands exponentially. Lovely juice. 2014-2019. **88.**

2013 Cheverny “Frileuse”- Le Clos du Tue Boeuf

The 2013 Cheverny “Frileuse” from the Puzelat brothers’ Le Clos du Tue Boeuf is another really pretty, bright and soil-driven middleweight, with lovely intensity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a very pretty blend of quince, grapefruit, chalky soil, a touch of grassiness, white flowers and lanolin. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and tangy, with a modest core, lovely soil signature, snappy acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and gently savory finish. Lovely, low octane, food wine. 2014-2020. **87+**.

2011 Cheverny- Luc Percher

Luc Percher was a new grower to me this fall, and I was very impressed with the quality of both of his bottlings I tasted. The 2011 Cheverny is drinking very well, offering up a superb nose of tangerine, lemon, lovely soil tones, a touch of lanolin and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and focused, with snappy acids on the backend, very good balance and fine length and grip on the finish, which closes with a note of citrus pith. A fine example. 2014-2020. **89**.

2011 Cour-Cheverny- Luc Percher

Luc Percher’s Cheverny is a lovely wine, but his finest bottling is this great Cour-Cheverny, which is made from one hundred and fifteen year-old Romartin vines. The brilliant nose soars from the glass in a blaze of lime, orange, stunning complex minerality, a touch of menthol and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with a rock solid core, great focus and grip and a very, very long and zesty finish. Beautiful juice. 2014-2025. **93+**.

2012 Cour-Cheverny “le Petit Chambord” Vendanges Manuelles- Domaine François Cazin

The 2012 Cour-Cheverny from François Cazin is a very good bottle, but it is currently a bit tight and could use a year in the cellar to blossom. This is another one of the lower octane offerings to be found in the Loire, but its 12.5 percent alcohol seems positively heady in comparison to some of the 2013s out there! The wine is pure and tightly-knit, wafting from the glass in a primary mélange of green apple, tart pear, stony soil tones, a bit of lemongrass and an discreetly exotic topnote of fresh tarragon. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nascently complex, with a really lovely core of fruit, brilliant transparency, superb balance and grip and a very long, pure and youthful finish. This is going to be a really lovely bottle of wine, but it deserves a bit of time in the cellar to fully blossom. 2016-2025+. **91**.

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.

2013 Cheverny Rouge- Hervé Villemade

The 2013 Cheverny Rouge from Hervé Villemade is another decidedly low octane red from this vintage, coming in at an even eleven percent alcohol and being quite light in color. The ripeness here, obviously, is very moderate, and though the wine offers up lovely aromatics, it is really on the cusp of underripe on the palate, as the tannins have a very slightly gritty aspect to

them, and there is not a whole lot of buffering fruit to counteract this impression. That said, the wine is still pretty tasty, as it offers up a complex and very transparent nose of dark berries, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones, acorns and a bit of conifer tree bark. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and quite soil-driven, with lovely focus, fine intensity of flavor and very impressive length and grip on the slightly dry-edged finish. This is really a very well-made wine from a clearly challenging vintage, and though, again, it will probably be a bit too light for some palates, there is a lot to like here and it really does nicely already at table. 2014-2020. **87.**

Menetou-Salon and Quincy

2013 Quincy “Cuvée Très Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Mardon

The old vine cuvée from Domaine Mardon is one of my favorite wines produced in Quincy, and the 2013 is another quite strong effort. The bright and classic nose jumps from the glass in a mix of gooseberry, sweet grapefruit, cut grass, a nice touch of white flowers and fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, very good complexity, sound framing acids and just a touch of bitterness on the long and focused finish. This is a touch soft and a tad on the heavy-handed side, due to the nature of the vintage, but it is still a very tasty and complex bottle of Quincy that will offer up a lot of pleasure over the next year or two. 2014-2016. **88.**

2013 Quincy “Grandes Vignes”- Domaine Villalin

Domaine Villalin’s vineyards are located in the old, original section of the Quincy appellation, which lies on the northern bank of the Cher River, rather than on the other side of the river, where the lion’s share of today’s appellation of Quincy is to be found. The soils are far different on the northern side of the river, with silex and gravel producing far more *terroir*-specific examples than the sand and clay of the south side of the Cher. The 2013 is a lovely wine, wafting from the glass in an excellent blend of grapefruit, lemon, cut grass, a beautifully complex base of soil and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely racy for Quincy, with fine focus and grip, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. High class juice. 2014-2020. **90.**

Coteaux du Giennois

The Coteaux du Giennois is due north of Sancerre and west of Auxerre, and the vignerons here like to bill their appellation as the “Little Brother of Sancerre”, as the grapes that hold sway here are sauvignon blanc for the white wines and pinot noir for the red wines, with similarly chalky soils. This was my first experience with these lovely Loire Valley wines, and they seem to offer excellent value for very flavorful and soil-driven wines. The red that I tasted, from the Berthier brothers, like a proper Sancerre rouge, was a bit structured and could use a year or two of bottle age to really blossom, but their Blanc was drinking beautifully and really tasted like a fine Sancerre at around half the price. Very good wines and fine values!

2013 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc- Clément et Florian Berthier

The 2013 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc from Clément et Florian Berthier is a lovely, full-bodied and very flavorful glass of Loire sauvignon blanc, with more body than most Touraine versions from this grape. The bouquet is a classic blend of gooseberry, tangerine, chalky soil tones, cut grass and white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely focused, with a good core, bright acids and very good length and grip on the backend. This is really a superb value. 2014-2017. **89.**

2013 Coteaux du Giennois Rouge- Clément et Florian Berthier

The 2013 Coteaux du Giennois Rouge from Clément et Florian Berthier is comprised entirely of pinot noir and is still a bit tight and buttoned up behind its structural elements, but with good underlying raw materials. The bouquet offers up a complex mix of cherries, pepper, woodsmoke, a bit of citrus peel and a nice base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and focused, with solid depth, tangy acids and good length and grip on the moderately tannic finish. This is certainly approachable today, but it really deserves a couple of years in the cellar to blossom. 2016-2025. **87.**

2013 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc- Domaine de Villargeau

The 2013 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc from Domaine de Villargeau is a fine bottle of sauvignon blanc, with a more flinty personality than the white from Clément et Florian Berthier, so that it has a bit more of a Pouilly-Fumé-like personality than the Berthier brothers' example. The excellent nose wafts from the glass in a mix of lime, gooseberry, cut grass, flinty soil tones and a bit of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, long and crisp, with fine focus and impressive complexity on the long and vibrant finish. Great bang for the buck! 2014-2017. **88.**

Pouilly-Fumé

2013 Pouilly-Fumé “Les Loges”- Domaine Michel Bailly et Fils

The 2013 Pouilly-Fumé “Les Loges” from Domaine Michel Bailly et Fils has a slightly candied aspect to its fruit tones on both the nose and palate, but it is not lacking in either depth or complexity and is not a bad drink, though not quite classic in its profile. The bouquet is a mix of candied lime, tart orange, smoky overtones, damp grass and a nice base of flinty soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with good, but not great depth at the core, sound acids and good length and grip on the slightly green finish. The difficulties of the vintage in getting complete ripeness are evident here, but only marginally so, with a bit more overt grassiness than is customary, but the wine is really quite tasty and should also age quite well. A good result from a difficult year. 2014-2020+. **87+.**

2013 Pouilly-Fumé- Domaine François Blanchet

The 2013 Pouilly-Fumé from François Blanchet is really an excellent wine, with the delineation and soil-driven personality of a great year, rather than a difficult vintage. The excellent bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy mélange of gooseberry, lime, fresh-cut grass, marvelously pure soil tones, white flowers and a touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with lovely focus and detail, a fine core and very good length and grip on the zesty finish. Fine juice and an excellent example of the 2013 vintage. 2014-2020. **90.**

2013 Pouilly-Fumé “Les Cris”- Domaine A. Cailbourdin

Monsieur Cailbourdin's 2013 Pouilly-Fumé “Les Cris” is a superb example of this vintage, offering up classic depth, cut and complexity and is one of the most complete sauvignon blanc-based wines I have tasted from this year. The vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a complex and very elegant blend of green apple, gooseberry, chalky soil tones, gentle notes of grassiness, lovely smokiness and a topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely backend grip and intensity and a long, classy finish. This wine is fully ripe- though just barely- and this gives it a lovely *nervosité* that makes it a very scintillating glass today and augurs very well for future evolution with bottle age. 2014-2020. **91.**



2013 Pouilly-Fumé- Domaine Jonathan Pabiot

The 2013 Pouilly-Fumé from Jonathan Pabiot is a terrific example of the vintage, absolutely superb cut and grip for this difficult growing season. The wine is produced from thirty year-old vines, which are hand-harvested and the fruit fermented solely with indigenous yeasts. The bouquet on the 2013 delivers an outstanding aromatic constellation of tangerine, gooseberry, smoke, petrol, fresh-cut grass, lovely soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and really rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip and a long, zesty and very serious finish. Excellent juice. 2014-2019. **92+**.

Sancerre

2013 Sancerre “Cuvée Chavignol”- Franck et Jean-François Bailly (Chavignol)

Domaine Bailly’s Cuvée Chavignol has consistently been a fine bottle of Sancerre, and the 2013 is another quite successful wine. The bouquet is quite classical in profile and excellent, wafting from the glass in a mix of lime, tangerine, chalky minerality, cut grass, citrus peel and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with a good core of fruit, fine focus, sound framing acids and very good length and grip on the wide open and succulent finish. As is typical of most 2013s, this will need drinking over the near-term, but it is nicely balanced and will provide plenty of pleasure over the next couple of years. 2014-2016. **89**.

2013 Sancerre “Chavignol”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (Chavignol)

Gérard Boulay has been making brilliant Sancerre from his from his estate in the village of Chavignol, but his 2013s may well be his finest hour, as the quality of these wines in the teeth of the vagaries of the vintage are simply phenomenal! The “basic” Chavignol bottling (talk about a misnomer!) offers up a simply superb bouquet of lemon, tart orange, great minerality, cut grass, spring flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with snappy acids, great focus and complexity and a very long, vibrant and utterly classic finish. Great juice. 2014-2020. **92.**

2013 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (Chavignol)

Monsieur Boulay’s 2013 Clos de Beaujeu, from his tiny, 75 *ares* parcel of forty-five year-old vines in this great vineyard is a monumental example of the vintage, offering up a stunning and very youthful nose of grapefruit, tart orange, kaleidoscopic minerality, botanicals and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very much defined by its complex minerality, with great mid-palate depth, electric acids and stunning focus and grip on the very, very long, soil-driven finish. A transcendental 2013 Sancerre! 2016-2035. **95.**

2013 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (Chavignol)

The Monts Damnés from Domaine Gérard Boulay is another 2013 Sancerre that seems to repudiate the characteristics of the vintage. The wine raised in a combination of old oak and tank and the 2013 offers up a stellar bouquet of gooseberry, tangerine, lime peel, great minerality, fresh-cut grass, white flowers and a touch of fresh tarragon in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with outstanding focus and grip, snappy acids and great soil signature on the long, complex and very classy finish. This is a bit more forward out of the blocks than the Clos de Beaujeu, but every bit as fine. 2014-2030+. **94+.**

2013 Sancerre “La Côte”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (Chavignol)

The 2013 La Côte is a brilliant young bottle of Sancerre. Monsieur Boulay only began producing a single vineyard bottling from La Grande Côte in the 2010 vintage, as these are some of his younger vines, and until the celebrated their twentieth birthday in 2010, he felt that they were simply still too young to be bottled on their own. The 2013 La Côte is brilliant, wafting from the glass in a stunning mélange of grapefruit, lemon, kaleidoscopic minerality, petrol, complex botanicals, a touch of smokiness and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and again simply shows off stunning mid-palate depth for the vintage, with brisk acids, laser-like focus and great grip on the pure and dancingly long finish. Great, great wine. 2016-2035+. **95+.**

2013 Sancerre “La Comtesse”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (Chavignol)

Monsieur Boulay makes his La Comtesse bottling from a couple of parcels of fifty year-old vines in the heart of the Monts Damnés, with one section right alongside Edmond Vatan’s Clos la Néore and the other just a touch higher up the slope. The 2013 is outrageously fine, delivering a magically complex nose of lemon, tangerine, cut grass, white flowers, a very complex base of chalky minerality, citrus peel and fresh tarragon. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and so elegant on the attack that it is almost silky in texture, with great mid-palate intensity, superb focus and grip, racy acids and brilliant complexity on the very long and snappy finish. Another absolutely astonishing 2013 Sancerre! 2014-2035+. **95+.**

2013 Sancerre “Le Mont”- Foucher-Lebrun

Foucher-Lebrun is a small négociant in the region that has recently added a new partner and increased the quality of the fruit and/or wines that they are purchasing for their small bottlings. Their 2013 Sancerre “Le Mont” is really a terrific example of the vintage, which is

made from lots of wine that the partners have purchased from several parcels of grapes in the villages of Sancerre, Chavignol and Amigny, with the wine fermented entirely in stainless steel tanks and bottled after ten months of nurturing on its fine lees. The bouquet delivers an excellent and classic mélange of gooseberry, orange peel, fresh-mown grass, a lovely signature of chalky minerality, a touch of petrol and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and pure at the core, with lovely backend energy, excellent focus and grip and a long, outstanding finish. Hard to believe this is a 2013 Sancerre! Outstanding value. 2014-2020+. **93.**

2013 Sancerre “La Garenne”- Domaine Fernand Girard et Fils

The 2013 La Garenne from Domaine Girard et Fils is quite a good bottle of Sancerre, with its thirteen percent alcohol level on the label probably indicative of a bit of chapitalization. The bouquet shows a nice blend of grassy, less ripe elements and a bit of succulent fruit tones in its mélange of gooseberry, lime peel, chalky soil tones, plenty of grassiness and a touch of upper register petrol. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with a slightly green aspect to the acids, fine focus and grip, a good core and lovely soil signature and backend energy on the long finish. The slightly less ripe structural elements here give the wine nice cut out of the blocks, but I suspect this will be a wine to drink in the first couple of years in bottle, rather than rolling the dice on how the structure will evolve with further bottle age. In the context of 2013, this is a quite successful effort. 2014-2016. **88.**



Looking down on the center of the small village of Chavignol from the top of the Monts Damnés.

2013 Sancerre- Domaine Pierre Martin (Chavignol)

The 2013 Sancerre from Pierre Martin is a very bright and succulent example of the vintage, offering up a classic nose of gooseberry, grapefruit, fresh-cut grass, a nice base of limestone and just a touch of white pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with crisp acids, fine focus and complexity and a long, zesty finish. This is really a lovely bottle of Sancerre that is wide open and drinking with great personality right out of the blocks. 2014-2017. **89.**

2013 Sancerre “Les Monts Damnés”- Domaine Pierre Martin

The 2013 Sancerre “Les Monts Damnés” from Domaine Pierre Martin is a very good effort for the vintage and a very tasty glass of Sancerre for drinking over the next few years. The wine wafts from the glass in a complex mélange of gooseberry, lemon, vibrant grassy tones, chalky minerality, a bit of citrus peel and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, bright and quite wide open finish. Good juice and a very fine 2013. 2014-2017+. **90+.**

2013 Sancerre “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Gérard et Pierre Morin

The 2012 old vine bottling from Domaine Morin is a good, strong effort for the vintage, offering up a complex and slightly deeper-pitched bouquet of gooseberry, lime, chalky soil tones, damp grass, a touch of petrol and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and wide open, with a good core, sound acids and a long, complex and nicely laid back finish. This wine misses just a touch of backend grip, when considered in the light of wines like the 2010 or 2012 versions, but it is a tasty bottle of Bué Sancerre for near-term drinking. 2014-2016. **89.**

2013 Sancerre “Cuvée les Côûtes”- Domaine Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy

The 2013 Cuvée les Côûtes from Pascal and Nicolas Reverdy is a very strong example of the vintage, with a bit more cut and grip than is typical with many of the 2013 Sancerre offerings. The bouquet is a very pretty and classic blend of grapefruit, chalky minerality, gentle notes of cut grass, orange peel and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and quite long, with fine complexity, good focus and grip, fine mid-palate depth and lovely framing acids adding bounce on the finish. Good juice. 2014-2017. **90.**

2013 Sancerre “l’Authentique”- Claude et Florence Thomas-Labaille (Chavignol)

One would expect a good bottle of 2013 l’Authentique from Domaine Thomas-Labaille, and that is exactly what one gets with this very pretty bottle of Sancerre. The wine offers up a grassy bouquet of lime, grapefruit, chalky soil tones, fresh-mown grass and a bit of candied lemon peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and minerally, with a good core, bright acids and a slightly green aspect on the backend of the long finish that shows that this wine is not overly ripe in profile. But, there is cut, grip and complexity, none of which were easy to find in the 2013 vintage! 2014-2016. **89.**

2013 Sancerre- Domaine des Vieux Pruniers (Bué)

The 2013 Sancerre from Domaine des Vieux Pruniers is a lovely and quite classic bottle of Bué Sancerre, wafting from the glass in a mix of gooseberry, orange peel, cut grass, chalky soil tones and a touch of petrol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and impressively long on the finish, with fine mid-palate concentration, bright acids and lovely bounce and focus on the long and vibrant finish. 2014-2016. **91+.**

2012 Sancerre “Cuvée les Angeslots”- Domaine Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy

The 2012 Cuvée les Angeslots from Domaine Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy is still in the market, and it has grown nicely in the bottle since I last saw it a year ago and it is clear that I slightly underestimated this wine in its tightly-knit youth. As readers may recall, this wine is produced from a single parcel of seventy-five year-old vines and is vinified and aged in old *foudres*, rather than stainless steel tanks. The wine is now really singing on both the nose and palate, with a bouquet of gooseberry, grapefruit, lime, limestone minerality, a touch of cut grass and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a rock solid core, snappy acids, laser-like focus and outstanding grip on the very long and utterly refined finish. A very, very high class bottle of Sancerre. 2014-2025. **94.**

2012 Sancerre “Chêne Marchand”- Domaine Gérard et Pierre Morin

The Morin family has owned a small slice of the great Bué vineyard of Chêne Marchand for many years, but they have decided to bottle it on its own only since 2010. Their 2012 Chêne Marchand is outstanding, offering up a truly lovely and still quite youthful bouquet of grapefruit, tart orange, white flowers, a dollop of fresh-mown grass and hints of petrol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a very long, nascently complex finish. Fine juice that is very tasty today, but will be even better with a year or two of bottle age. 2014-2022. **92+.**

2007 Sancerre “les Culs de Beaujeu”- Domaine François Cotat (Chavignol)

I have absolutely loved each and every bottle of 2007 that I have opened from François Cotat, and this most recent bottle of Culs de Beaujeu was drinking with great style and complexity. The pure, very complex and refined nose offers up a classic mélange of grapefruit, orange peel, chalky soil tones, lime blossoms, a bit of damp grass, fresh almond and a nice touch of fresh tarragon in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and marvelously complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, bright acids, outstanding balance and a very long, pure and focused finish. Lovely juice that is drinking at its peak today, but still has many years in front of it. 2014-2025. **93.**

2007 Sancerre “la Grande Côte”- Domaine François Cotat (Chavignol)

If I had more discipline, I would not be opening bottles of the 2007 Grande Côte from François Cotat right now, as the wine is still very obviously climbing in quality and is a few years away from its true apogee. However, the wine is simply so good to drink right now that I cannot help myself! This most recent bottle was outstanding, delivering a complex and vibrant bouquet of lemon, grapefruit, beeswax, lovely botanicals, a touch of anise and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and very complex, with a rock solid core, zesty acids, crystalline minerality and excellent focus and grip on the very long and nicely ripe finish. I love the utterly classic sense of balance of this wine, which is not as heady in ripeness as other recent vintages such as 2009, and is far the better for it! 2014-2030+. **94+.**

2002 Sancerre “Clos la Néore”- Domaine Edmond Vatan (Chavignol)

At age fourteen, the 2002 Clos la Néore is really drinking beautifully, as it is now wide open and in full bloom. The superb nose wafts from the glass in a blend of lime, orange, fresh almonds, Vatan botanicals, kaleidoscopic minerality and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with a superb core of fruit, stunning transparency, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and utterly pure finish. In a perfect world, I would probably not be drinking this wine with quite so much regularity, but

as I was lucky enough to find three cases of it upon release (scouring the US market to piece together bottles here and there), I did not want to see it go the way of so many white Bordeaux and premox on me while there was still a large pile in the cellar. Happily, there has been absolutely no signs of anything but classic evolution for this wine over the course of many, many bottles, and it may well be that Monsieur Vatan's wines will simply never have any issues with premox. While the 2002 Clos la Néore is into its apogee, it has years and years of life still ahead of it and there is no reason to hurry its consumption. 2014-2025+. **95.**

2001 Sancerre “les Monts Damnés”- Domaine François Cotat (Chavignol)

The 2001 Monts Damnés from François Cotat is drinking splendidly at age thirteen and still has years and years of life ahead of it. The deep, bright and simply beautiful bouquet offers up scents of lime, tangerine, beeswax, candied lemon peel, a superb base of chalky soil tones and a lovely topnote of Cotat botanicals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very refined in profile, with excellent mid-palate depth, bright, tangy acids and laser-like focus on the long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Just a beautiful wine at its apogee, but with a long was still to go. 2014-2030. **94.**

1999 Sancerre “Grande Côte”- Domaine Pascal Cotat (Chavignol)

The 1999 Grande Côte from Pascal Cotat is still a nice drink that is getting to the far end of its plateau and will be starting to decline in the very near-future. The wine is still quite enticing aromatically, but is beginning to dry out a bit already on the backend of the palate and getting a bit bitter. The mature and complex bouquet is a fine blend of lime, green apple, flinty minerality, damp grass and orange peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp, but not as complex as the nose, with respectable mid-palate depth, sound acids and the aforementioned touch of bitterness on the fairly long finish showing that the end is near. It is not going to collapse overnight, but it is time to drink it up. 2014-2017. **88.**

1999 Sancerre “Grande Côte” Cuvée Spéciale- Domaine Pascal Cotat (Chavignol)

The 1999 Cuvée Spéciale from Pascal Cotat is holding up a better than the regular bottling from Grande Côte and still has plenty of life ahead of it. As folks probably know, this is a later-harvested bottling that typically will have a fair bit of residual sugar in it on release, but over time, this wine tends to dry out a bit and today only shows a touch of remaining sweetness on the palate. The bouquet is excellent, as it jumps from the glass in a blend of sweet grapefruit, orange, beeswax, lime blossoms, fresh-cut grass and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and seamless in its balance, with a fine core of fruit, just a bit of residual sugar (which is very nicely framed by crisp acidity) and excellent length and grip on the complex and vibrant finish. This is a lovely wine. 2014-2025+. **92.**

1989 Sancerre “Grande Côte”- Domaine François Cotat (Chavignol) served from magnum

1989 was a great year in Sancerre and the Grande Côte bottling from François Cotat is still drinking at its absolute apogee in magnum. The bouquet offers up a pure and tertiary aromatic blend of candied lime, beeswax, oranges, chalky minerality, Cotat botanicals and a lovely topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still shows a fair bit of residual sweetness, with a superb signature of soil, sound framing acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and vibrant finish. This is a beautiful wine where the Cotats obviously decided to leave a bit of residual sugar, rather than ferment the wine out to total dryness and drive up the alcohol, and while it is a bit sweeter than one might expect from a “regular” bottling of Grande Côte, the wine was so beautifully balanced out of the blocks that it shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon, even at age twenty-five! 2014-2030+. **94.**



Sancerre Rosé

1999 Sancerre Rosé- Domaine Pascal Cotat (Chavignol)

The 1999 Sancerre Rosé from Pascal Cotat is still a remarkably light salmon color and is still shows quite a bit of aromatic vitality, but the wine is starting to show its age a bit on the palate and is probably best drunk up in the next few years, while it still delivers considerable appeal. The fine nose is a mature blend of pepper, woodsmoke, orange peel, chalky soil tones and desiccated strawberries. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still structurally sound, with good, solid acidity and fine focus, but with the fruit now starting to slip to the background and signaling that the next few years will be the end of the line for this lovely wine, which has really had a marvelous run and is still quite tasty at age fifteen! 2014-2017. **88.**

Sancerre Rouge

2012 Sancerre Rouge- Domaine Bailly-Reverdy (Bué)

The 2012 Sancerre Rouge from Domaine Bailly-Reverdy is nicely ripe, as it reached thirteen percent alcohol in this vintage and the wine offers up very good potential on both the nose and palate. The youthful bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of dark berries, black cherries, a bit of pepper, charred wood, herb tones, incipient venison and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with a primary profile, fine focus and grip and a fair bit of tannin to resolve on the long and complex finish. This is going to be an excellent bottle of pinot noir in the fullness of time, but it is made in a serious manner and needs at least two or three years to blossom from behind its structural elements and really starts to drink with generosity. It will be superb and is a terrific value. 2017-2030+. **90+**.

2012 Sancerre “Le Mont” Rouge- Foucher-Lebrun

Foucher-Lebrun is a small négociant in the region that has recently added a new partner and increased the quality of the fruit and/or wines that they are purchasing for their small bottlings. The 2012 Sancerre “Le Mont” rouge is an outstanding bottle of pinot noir and one of the few reds from the region that does not demand a bit of bottle age before starting to drink well, as this wine is delicious out of the blocks. The superb nose is a blend of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, coffee bean, a lovely base of soil and perhaps just a touch of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and gently tannic, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and suave finish. High class Sancerre rouge and a stellar value! 2014-2025+. **91**.

2012 Sancerre Rouge- Domaine Pierre Martin (Chavignol)

The 2012 Sancerre Rouge bottling from Pierre Martin is a lovely bottle of pinot noir, and after all of the moderately ripe examples of red Loire wines from the 2013 vintage that I tasted for this report, the fully thirteen percent octane comes across as a very nice change of pace! The bouquet is youthfully complex and quite vibrant, offering up scents of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebirds, a fine base of chalky soil tones, chicory, a bit of fresh herbs and a discreet topnote of cola. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, excellent focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and still quite primary finish. It is customary for serious Sancerre rouge to be a bit austere out of the blocks, but the 2102 from Monsieur Martin has really impressive structural polish in its youth- which augurs very, very well for its future evolution! I would still give this wine a couple of years to start to blossom, though it is certainly approachable now, as it will be outstanding once it reaches its plateau of maturity. 2016-2035. **92**.

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Special Champagne Features:

Billecart-Salmon's "Cuvée Nicolas-François" Vertical Report
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Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Vertical Report

Non-Champagne Sparkling Wines

Franck Besson Rosé Granit Brut NV;
Jean-Louis Moissenet-Bonnard Crémant de Bourgogne Brut NV;
Domaine du Vissoux Crémant de Bourgogne Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV;

Alphabetical Listing of Champagne Producers and Their Wines Covered in This Article:

Barnaut "Rosé Authentique" Grand Cru Brut NV;
André Beaufort "Brut Réserve" Grand Cru; 2005 Brut Millésime Grand Cru;
Besserat de Bellefon "Cuvée des Moines" Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; "Cuvée des Moines" Brut NV; "Cuvée des Moines" Brut Rosé NV; 2002 "Cuvée des Moines" Brut Millésime;
Bollinger 2002 "Grande Année" Brut Millésime; 1996 "Grande Année" Brut Millésime;
Bernard Brémont "Cuvée Prestige" Brut NV;
Paul Clouët Brut Selection NV; Brut "Grand Cru" NV; Brut "Prestige" NV; Brut Rosé NV;
Ulysses Collin "Perrière" Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV;
Alexandre Filaine "Cuvée Spéciale" Brut NV; "Cuvée Confiance" Brut NV;
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D. Henriët-Bazin Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru Brut NV; "Sélection de Parcelles" Brut NV Premier Cru; Grand Cru Brut Rosé NV; 2008 Cuvée Marie-Amélie" Blanc de Blancs Fleurs de Vigne;
Krug 1966 Blanc de Blancs Brut;
Laherte Frères 2009 "les Vignes d'Autrefois" Extra Brut Millésime;
Lanson "Black Label" Brut NV; "Extra Age" Brut NV; Brut Rosé NV;
Georges Laval "Cumières" Brut Nature NV (Base Year 2010); "Les Hautes Chèvres" (Base Year 2008) Brut Nature;
Michel Lorient "Les Mutines Marie-Léopold" Sec NV; "Palmyre" Brut Nature NV; "Authentic Meunier" Blanc de Noirs Brut NV; "Patrimony" Brut NV; Theodorine "Les Mutines" Brut Rosé NV; 2004 "les Sources du Flagot" Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut; 2007 "Monodie en Meunier Majeur" VV Extra Brut; 2006 "Inspiration de Saison" Extra Brut;
Marguet Père et Fils 2008 "Amboniacus" Extra Brut Millésime;
Moët et Chandon 1990 Dom Perignon;
Clément Perseval Premier Cru Brut Nature;
Philipponnat 2006 "Le Léon" Blanc de Noirs Brut Millésime;
Salon 1983 Salon (served from magnum);

THE 2014 CHAMPAGNE ADDENDUM
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After my week in Champagne at the end of March and beginning of April, I was looking forward to catching up on several new releases from my favorite Champagne and Sparkling Wine producers over the autumn, as a great many new bottlings have arrived here in New York since I was in the region in the spring. In addition to several new releases and some producers' current wines in the market whom I did not get around to during the tasting sessions for the last article, I was also fortunate enough to participate in a handful of vertical tastings in preparation for this feature, so that reports of Billecart-Salmon's Cuvée Nicolas-François, Piper-Heidsieck's Cuvée Rare and Taittinger's magical blanc de blancs, Comtes de Champagne, also appear here due to my very, very good fortune over this past month. In fact, this October would have probably been one of the most memorable months of Champagne tasting in my career, and I would have been able to look back on it with great fondness, but for the sobering news that reached me immediately upon my return from my trip to Spain in early October. This was the very sad news that Charles Heidsieck's extremely talented *Chef de Cave*, Thierry Roset, had passed away suddenly at his home in Reims at the start of the month, stricken by an aneurism while he was at home with his family. I had only had the opportunity to meet Thierry in person this past June, during his most recent visit to New York, and given how long I have admired the brilliant work that he accomplished at Charles Heidsieck over the course of his long career, his sudden passing was quite a shock and cast a bit of shadow on all of the great Champagne tastings that I had an opportunity to participate in over the month of October.

For many Champagne lovers, Thierry Roset's name was not as familiar as many of the other great winemakers in the region, as he was a very private man who never sought out the spotlight and much preferred to have his beautiful wines do the talking for him. When I had the chance to meet and taste with him this summer, I was very happy to be able to spend a couple of hours with him, speaking French, as he was not comfortable with his English (which happened to be far better than my French!) and had an interpreter at our tasting, but we were able to discuss his philosophy and his commitment to the rich history of Charles Heidsieck's Champagnes in his native tongue, which made for a far more convivial visit for us both. I should also note that he was pouring some of his beautiful new releases for me during our interview, which always makes the time fly by with that certain *je ne sais quoi* and always seems to improve my vocabulary in French! Thierry began his career at Charles Heidsieck as an intern in 1985, working alongside the house's famous *Chef de Cave* at that time, Daniel Thibault. After his year's *stage* at Charles Heidsieck, Thierry Roset added to his experience with a *stage* at Moët et Chandon, prior to returning full-time to Charles Heidsieck in 1988. During the course of his long career, he worked as an assistant first to Monsieur Thibault, and then to Régis Camus, in the *crayères* cellars at Charles Heidsieck, helping to craft some of Reims most impressive and consistently excellent bottlings. After Monsieur Thibault's retirement in 1992, Thierry Roset assumed full management of the cellars at both Piper-Heidsieck and Charles Heidsieck, overseeing the aging, riddling and *dégorgement* of the wines at both houses, while acting as a permanent member of Monsieur Camus' blending and tasting team (the nerve center of any *Grande Marque*) and an integral member of the management team at Charles Heidsieck.

In the last decade, as Régis Camus' responsibilities extended more and more to the wines at Piper-Heidsieck as well, Thierry Roset became the *de facto* Cellar Master at Charles Heidsieck, and this reality was formally recognized in 2012, when he officially received the title of *Chef de Cave* at the house. He had already been focusing more and more of his energies on the wines at Charles Heidsieck for many years prior to his official recognition as *Chef de Cave* at the property, and he long had a reputation as one of the master blenders in Reims for his outstanding palate. He was a dear friend of Louis Roederer's Technical Director and *Chef de Cave*, Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon, and for the last decade or so, the two great winemakers have met once a year with their teams to share their new blends of their various cuvées and discuss technical aspects and vintage assessments. This is a very, very rare sharing of ideas in the quite competitive world of Champagne's *Grandes Marques*, and this openness and willingness to compare ideas and impressions further underscored what an extraordinary personality Thierry Roset was during his time at Charles Heidsieck. To cite just one example of his extraordinary vision and commitment to excellence at Charles Heidsieck, Thierry decided not to produce any vintage-dated wines from the superb 2002 vintage, as he felt that it was more important to use a sizable percentage of the production from this great year to refresh the stocks of reserve wines in the cellar that form the backbone of the non-vintage bottlings at Charles Heidsieck. Keep in mind, that every non-vintage bottle of Charles Heidsieck includes forty percent reserve wines, and rather than potentially take something away from the reserve wines in the cellars here to produce a set of 2002 vintage-dated wines, Monsieur Roset took the decision to utilize much of the production from this superb year to ensure that the reserve wine stocks at Charles would be augmented by great juice and add depth and dimension to many future releases of the non-vintage cuvées. Thierry Roset's tragic passing will leave a big hole at Charles Heidsieck, but he leaves behind a

legacy of outstanding professionalism and a great library of beautifully crafted wines, and he will be greatly missed in the years to come. Monsieur Roset was fifty-five years of age.



Thierry Roset, in New York this past June, during his last trip to the city to share the magic of Charles Heidsieck.

I should note that in preparing this follow-up feature on Champagne to the long article that appeared in Issue 52, I had the opportunity to re-taste several bottlings from producers which I had reviewed in that last article, and which had merited special mention in the introductory remarks to that Champagne article. I just wanted to reiterate that the entire new lineup from Benoit Marguet at Champagne Marguet Père et Fils is truly exceptional, and though I only have notes on a couple of new releases from Monsieur Marguet in this feature, I had the pleasure to revisit a great many of his current releases and unequivocally confirm that he is making the finest wines of his career and now must be ranked up at the very pinnacle of Grower-Récoltants in the region! In addition, the wines from two new producers to me in Issue 52, Aurélien Suenen in Cramant and Mouzon-Leroux et Fils in Verzy. Aurélien Suenen was born in 1985 and was a very talented basketball player throughout his early years, which led him to pursue a career as a professional basketball player and he spent four summers playing with other French players here in the US. In 2004, he decided to return to his family's *maison* and follow in his father's footsteps as a *vigneron*, and worked closely with his father until he fell ill in 2008 and eventually passed away in 2009. Aurélien Suenen has received some tutoring from other *vignerons* in the region, including Anselme Selosse, and he continued to work with an employee of the family

domaine who had worked with his father for twenty-five years, so that Aurélian's first vintage on his own in 2009 has turned out beautifully. I reported on the wine in Issue 52 and only mention it again, as it was equally brilliant when I revisited it in July and clearly Monsieur Suenen is an up and coming star in the Côte des Blancs. Mouzon-Leroux et Fils can trace their origins as *vignerons* in the region back to 1776, and they currently farm ten hectares of vines, primarily in Verzy (eight hectares) and the remainder in Verzenay, Ludes and Villers-Marmery. The current generation of the family to run the estate are Pascale, Philippe and Sébastien Mouzon, and this is another absolutely dynamite estate that should be on every Champagne lover's radar!

Of the notes that follow, I have listed the non-Champagne, Sparkling Wines first, followed by the three vertical reports, and then a breakdown of Champagne tasting notes in their customary fashion, by style of *cuvée*, with Sec wines appearing first, followed by non-vintage bottlings by *dosage* level, and then vintage-dated wines. All of the wines have been tasted between the end of June and the release of Issue 52 and the end of October. As Champagne is such a large and dynamic region, these bi-annual reports only scratch the surface of all of the exciting new currents emerging in this area, and I wish I had more time to devote to the world's finest sparkling wines. I should also note that all of the fine bevy of sparkling wines that I tasted from the Loire Valley, which along with Catalunya, is probably my favorite, non-Champagne region for sparklers, appear in the article on the Loire Valley, rather than here in this report. I did not seek out a lot of non-Champagne samples for this article, as I already knew, with a trip to Spain, the annual Loire Valley feature, and all of the other tastings I had lined up for September and October of this year, that I would have a hard time finishing all of the tasting required for this issue even remotely close to the start of November, but will make a concerted effort for next spring's feature on sparkling wines to cast the net a bit wider afield and include a great many more sparkling wines from regions outside of Champagne. Several of my favorite producers' new releases, such as the excellent portfolio of Grower-Récoltants represented by Champagne et Villages and sold in the US by Becky Wasserman, did not make it to the states in time for this article. I will look forward to tasting those wines when they arrive here in New York and may include another Champagne feature in a coming issues to get the notes on those important producers, such as Camille Savès, Godmé Père et Fils, Demièrre-Ansiot, Vazart-Coquart, José Dhondt and a host of others, out to subscribers while the wines are still in the pipeline.

Sparkling Wines

Crémant de Bourgogne Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV- Domaine du Vissoux

Pierre-Marie Chermette's Crémant de Bourgogne is a very well-made and utterly satisfying wine. The bouquet offers up a complex and deep mélange of apple, peach, a touch of fruit skin, salty soil tones and citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and juicy on the attack, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the structured and focused finish. Fine juice. 2014-2020. **88.**

Crémant de Bourgogne Brut NV- Jean-Louis Moissenet-Bonnard

Jean-Louis Moissenet-Bonnard is based in Pommard, but I imagine he sources his grapes for his fine Crémant de Bourgogne from a wider base of villages, though the wine is comprised entirely from pinot noir. The current release is really quite excellent, wafting from the glass in a pure and complex nose of quince, tart apple, bread dough, chalky minerality, just a touch of nutskin and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with excellent mid-palate concentration, zesty acids, frothy *mousse* and outstanding

length and grip on the long and youthful finish. This is already a good drink today, but it will be even better with another couple of years in the cellar to fully blossom. One of the best examples of Crémant de Bourgogne I have ever had the pleasure to taste! 2014-2025+. **91.**

Rosé Granit Brut NV- Franck Besson

Franck Besson is based in Juliéna and makes his Rosé Granit from one hundred percent gamay, with the wine aging for twelve months on its lees prior to disgorgement. The wine is a very pale salmon color and is a bit reductive when first opened, so give it a bit of aeration before starting to drink it. With air, the wine offers up scents of melon, white cherries, stony soil tones, citrus blossoms and a bit of bread dough in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and complex, with lovely balance and focus, frothy *mousse*, a good core and impressive length and grip on the bouncy and soil-driven finish. Other than the bit of reduction, which the wine can be coaxed out of with a bit of preparation, this is really a very good bottle of sparkling wine and a fine value. 2014-2018. **87.**

Billecart-Salmon's "Cuvée Nicolas-François" Brut

The Cuvée Nicolas-François Billecart from Billecart-Salmon is produced solely from fruit from grand cru-ranked villages, with the *cépages* typically a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay. Billecart-Salmon first crafted this *Tête de Cuvée* under this name in the 1964 vintage, with the wine named in honor of the founding member of the Billecart family to open this house, Nicolas-François Billecart. Monsieur Billecart opened the *maison* in 1818, after having married Mademoiselle Elizabeth Salmon, as both family's had been *vignerons* in the region with substantial vineyard holdings prior to the marriage, and Monsieur Billecart felt that it was an opportune moment to create their own Champagne. Today, Billecart-Salmon is the longest-lived, independent, family-owned Champagne house in the region, with the seventh generation of the Billecart family now running the *maison*. While the Cuvée Nicolas-François Billecart only dates from the 1964 vintage, the house previously produced a top of the line bottling under a different label, which was made from the same vineyard sources and along the same cellaring practices, so that one can sometimes see references to vintages such as the 1959 Cuvée Nicolas-François Billecart, which would have been originally labeled differently, but later releases (such as the bottle of the '59 out of Billecart's cellars that was submitted to an end of the millennium Champagne tasting in 1999 and won the competition) would have been placed on the market with the Cuvée Nicolas-François labeling. Jérôme Lafouge, a member of Billecart's management team in Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, recounts that "1964 was the first to be released under the Cuvée Nicolas-François Billecart name, but the formulation for this cuvée has remained the same since the beginning of the house."

Billecart-Salmon sources all of the chardonnay for this bottling from the Côtes des Blancs, with the pinot noir hailing from vineyards on the Montagne de Reims. The majority of the fruit for this bottling hails from Billecart's own vineyards, but this is not exclusive, as they have always included some purchased fruit in this bottling from growers that the house has worked with for several generations. Since 1987, the house barrel-ferments a small percentage of the *vins clairs* that are to be used in the Cuvée Nicolas-François, with the barrel-fermented wines for the blend not going through malolactic fermentation. Some of the *vins clairs* for the bottling that are fermented in stainless steel tanks do go through malolactic, so that the resulting wine is a blend of both malo and non-malo wines. The wine spends anywhere from eight to fifteen years aging on its fine lees, with the average usually being twelve years (but this, of course, depends

upon the structure and style of any given vintage), prior to disgorgement and preparation for the market, with the *dosage* typically around eight grams per liter for this bottling. Billecart has produced their Cuvée Nicolas-François in 1964, 1966, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1979, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2002, so the effort is more along the lines of Philipponnat's Clos des Goisses to produce the bottling in most good to exceptional vintages, rather than the less frequent production of a wine such as Piper-Heidsieck's "Rare". At our vertical tasting, we only stretched back as far as the 1990 Cuvée Nicolas-François, which was an outstanding and quite vibrant example of this vintage, which generally has aged fairly briskly, and the fine showing of the 1990 indicates that this is a fairly long-lived cuvée. I hope in the years to come to gain more experience with some of the older vintages from the 1980s or 1970s, to get a real sense of just how well this bottling evolves with bottle age.

2002 Billecart-Salmon "Cuvée Nicolas-François" Brut

The 2002 Cuvée Nicolas-François is still a fairly young wine, but at this early stage, it looks likely to be one of the top recent vintages of this bottling. The wine is still quite primary in its aromatic profile, offering up scents of green apple, quince, stony minerality, fresh pineapple, a touch of nutmeg and bread dough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and quite tightly-knit, with a good core of fruit, fine *mousse* and very good grip on the focused and long finish. This still needs a few years to blossom, but should prove to be very good indeed. 2018-2035+. **93.**

2000 Billecart-Salmon "Cuvée Nicolas-François" Brut

The 2000 Cuvée Nicolas-François was showing quite well at our vertical tasting, with a completely wide open personality that delivers scents of apple tangerine, plenty of smokiness, a fine base of soil and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and shows off very good mid-palate depth, with frothy *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty finish. The 2000 is drinking very well at the present time, but shows off good balance and should have no trouble cruising along at this altitude for at least another dozen years or so. 2014-2030+. **93.**

1999 Billecart-Salmon "Cuvée Nicolas-François" Brut

I had a dynamite bottle of the 1999 Cuvée Nicolas-François when visiting the winery at the end of March of this year, but our bottle at the vertical was not showing well at all, with a rather heavy-handed personality, a short finish and some overtly oxidative notes on the nose that seemed to indicate that it had been stored a touch warm somewhere along the line. As it was not a pristine bottle, I did not rate the wine. I direct folks back to Issue 52 for a tasting note on a proper bottle of the 1999.

1998 Billecart-Salmon "Cuvée Nicolas-François" Brut

The 1998 vintage of Billecart's Cuvée Nicolas-François is quite nice, though it seems to be a bit more shut down at the present time than the 2000 vintage. The bouquet is a touch reticent, as it offers up scents of apple, peach, nutty tones, warm bread and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite stylish on the attack, with a good core, fine *mousse*, but a tad on the grumpy side today on the long and well-balanced finish. I would give this vintage of Cuvée Nicolas-François a couple more years in the cellar to emerge from its adolescent funk. 2016-2030. **90+.**

1996 Billecart-Salmon “Cuvée Nicolas-François” Brut

The 1996 vintage of Cuvée Nicolas-François may well be my favorite of recent times, as the wine is deep, complex and absolutely beautiful in its sense of balance and backend energy on the palate. The excellent nose wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, peach, brioche, complex minerality, citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with superb balance and grip, very refined *mousse* and a long, focused and outstanding finish. This is excellent juice that is into its apogee of peak maturity, but will last for decades to come. 2014-2040. **94+**.

1995 Billecart-Salmon “Cuvée Nicolas-François” Brut

Our bottle of 1995 Cuvée Nicolas-François at the vertical was sadly corked, but I just mention that underneath the TCA was an absolutely lovely bottle of bubbly, and I am sure that this is an outstanding vintage for this bottling, if one gets a sound example.

1990 Billecart-Salmon “Cuvée Nicolas-François” Brut

The 1990 Cuvée Nicolas-François is a very strong example of the vintage, with more brightness and youthful bounce than is customary with a fairly wide selection of top Champagne bottlings from this particular vintage, which in general has aged a bit faster than I might have imagined. However, the 1990 Cuvée Nicolas-François is at its apogee, offering up a fine aromatic constellation of peach, nutskin, warm bread, a strong vein of minerality, citrus peel and nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and superb at the core, with elegant, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids, lovely focus and grip and a very long, complex and *à point* finish. A lovely, lovely wine. 2014-2035. **94**.

Piper-Heidsieck’s “Cuvée Rare” Brut

At the end of October, I was invited to a very rare vertical tasting of every vintage ever produced of Piper-Heidsieck’s *Tête de Cuvée*, “Rare”, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the house’s current Technical Director and *Chef de Cave*, Régis Camus, who joined the house in 1994. The house set up a dinner tasting with Monsieur Camus here in New York where all eight vintage ever produced of Piper-Heidsieck Rare were served, dating back to the 1976 vintage, which was the very first crafted by the *Grande Marque* of this particular cuvée. Piper-Heidsieck had actually produced a *Tête de Cuvée* prior to the first vintage of their Rare bottling in 1976, which was called “Florens-Louis” (named after the founder of the *maison*), which was first produced in the 1961 vintage and released into the market in 1967. It was eventually replaced by the cuvée Rare in the ’76 vintage. In looking at the roster of vintages in which Rare was produced: 2002, 1999, 1998, 1990, 1988, 1985, 1979 and 1976, it is interesting to see which years were selected for this bottling, and which vintages were overlooked. Certainly, most of the vintages above are top flight vintages where one would expect a house to produce its *Tête de Cuvée*, such as 2002, 1999, 1990, 1985, 1979 and 1976, but the inclusion of both 1998 and 1988 seemed just a touch curious, particularly when one sees that vintages such as 1996, 1995, 1989 and 1982 were skipped over. I asked Monsieur Camus about this small detail, as I was curious to know why one vintage was selected over another, and he replied simply that in certain years, it was deemed more important to produce a top flight Brut Millésime bottling at Piper, such as in 1996, and that the integrity of the reserve wine program at Piper-Heidsieck, as is the case also at their sister house of Charles Heidsieck, takes precedence over the production of other bottlings. And, as the notes below will attest, both the 1998 and the 1988 vintages of Rare have turned out to be superb wines and fully warrant their inclusion alongside of more well-known Champagne vintages.

Since the very first vintage of Rare in 1976, the *cépages* of the bottling has always been the same for this wine: seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent pinot noir. While most of the villages used for sourcing grapes for Rare are grand crus, there are some premier crus also included in the blend. Monsieur Camus observed that “we generally use the production from the same seventeen crus in most vintages for this bottling, though there can be a bit of variation here, as the emphasis is always on getting the finest grapes to make a vintage of Rare.” He continued, “while most of these crus are grand crus, with all of the pinot noir coming from the Montagne de Reims and most of the chardonnay coming from the top handful of villages in the Côte des Blancs, we do use a bit of chardonnay from a village on the Montagne de Reims as well, which is actually best-known for its pinot noir, as well as one premier cru in the Côte des Blancs, Vertus.” The first five vintages of Rare, from 1976 up through the 1990, were made from *vins clairs* that did not go through malolactic fermentation, but this was reconsidered after the 1990 vintage and from the 1998 vintage forwards, all of the *vins clairs* for Rare now undergo malolactic fermentation. Thus far, there has only been one vintage, the 1998 Rare, that was produced in magnums, with all other vintages made only in normal-sized formats. However, the 1998 was only produced in magnums, and Régis Camus now states that future vintages of Rare will be made in both regular and magnum-sized bottles.

2002 Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Rare” Brut

The 2002 Rare is starting to really drink well, as the wine is blossoming from behind its lovely structural elements and is really a fine, fine example of the vintage. As I noted in the last feature on Champagne back in Issue 52, the bouquet has gotten toastier as the wine has opened up, with the wine now offering up a fine mélange of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, leesy overtones, a lovely base of soil, citrus zest and a touch of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant, with broad shoulders, very elegant *mousse*, an excellent core, great focus and grip and a very long, complex and beautifully-balanced finish. A superb wine that is just reaching its plateau and will drink beautifully for decades to come. 2014-2040+. **95.**

1999 Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Rare” Brut

The 1999 vintage in Champagne is quite a ripe year, and the 1999 Rare reflects the style of the vintage quite faithfully. The bouquet is deep, complex and already showing quite a bit of secondary development in its ripe constellation of apple, peach, leesy tones, blossoming notes of walnut, a nice briny note from the soil, citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite generous and open at the present time, with lovely depth at the core, elegant *mousse*, impressive and almost surprising mineral drive on the backend and a very long, complex and classy finish. This is a lovely example of the vintage. 2014-2035. **94.**

1998 Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Rare” Brut (served from magnum)

I really like the style and shape of the racy 1998 Rare, which is still quite youthful in profile and needs more time to fully blossom (particularly in magnum). The superb bouquet offers up a primary blend of quince, lemon, stony minerality, a touch of fresh almond, citrus peel, smoky notes and blossoming spice tones that are quite prevalent in older vintages of Rare. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and racy, with its minerality far more front and center in this vintage than in the 2002 or 1999, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, zesty acids and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and racy finish. This is a lovely wine

which will only get better with further bottle age, and I would be inclined to leave it sleeping in the cellar for several more years. 2020-2050+. 94.

1990 Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Rare” Brut

The 1990 vintage of Rare is a lovely wine that is at its apogee and really drinking quite well. Interestingly, Régis Camus commented that this wine is “catching its second wind”, as it seemed more mature to him a year or two ago than it does today! The fine and *à point* nose wafts from the glass in a blend of baked apples and pears, lovely spice tones, a touch of walnut, brioche, citrus blossoms and an exotic touch of saffron in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and at its peak, with a fine core, good underlying minerality, fine *mousse* and sound framing acids on the long and well-balanced finish. This is a very nice example of the vintage and a wine that is drinking very well indeed, but it is probably the weakest vintage of Rare that has been produced- ironically, from a vintage that was quite hyped in its youth. That said, this is still a very good bottle of bubbly and fully underscores just how consistent Piper has been with their Rare cuvée over the years. 2014-2025+. 92.



Régis Camus (center), Chef de Cave at Piper-Heidsieck, marking his twentieth anniversary at the Grande Marque.

1988 Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Rare” Brut

I love the 1988 vintage of Rare, which is a very, very fine example of this underrated, but excellent year in Champagne. The wine is now fully mature, but still bright and zesty, as it delivers a fine aromatic constellation of pear, peach, a nice dollop of honeycomb, toasted almonds, plenty of smokiness, brioche and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with frothy *mousse*, fine focus and soil signature, excellent focus and grip and a very long, utterly classic and

beautifully balanced finish. A superb vintage of Rare with years and years still ahead of it. 2014-2030+. **94.**

1985 Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Rare” Brut

Not surprisingly, the 1985 vintage of Piper-Heidsieck’s Rare is a bit more aromatically evolved than the 1988, but this too is at its apogee and drinking with great style today. The bouquet is a fine mélange of desiccated apple and pear, warm bread, a touch of honeycomb, saffron, lovely soil tones and a bit of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely *à point*, with lovely balance, elegant *mousse*, still very good acidity and lovely focus and grip on the long and classy finish. A lovely bottle for current consumption, but still with plenty of longevity in it. 2014-2030+. **93.**

1979 Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Rare” Brut

The 1979 vintage of Rare holds quite a bit of sentimental value for Monsieur Camus, for though he did not craft this particular wine (not yet being at Piper), it is the first vintage that he ever vinified on his own at the outset of his career as a winemaker in Champagne. This particular vintage of Rare is outstanding and one of my absolute favorites in a very stellar lineup, as it soars from the glass in a mature and very vibrant blend of candied citrus fruit, warm bread, baked peach, a touch of new leather, macadamia nut, a very complex base of soil and a touch of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and seamlessly balanced, with a fine core of fruit, crisp acids, excellent soil signature, vigorous *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the very complex and vibrant finish. A beautiful wine. 2014-2035. **95.**

1976 Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Rare” Brut

The inaugural vintage of Rare is drinking splendidly as it closes in on its fortieth birthday, and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The deep and complex nose offers up a tertiary mix of fresh apricot, saffron, honeycomb, *pain grillé*, a complex base of soil tones, macadamia nut and a touch of orange blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripe in personality, with but a lovely core of fruit, still good acids and underlying minerality, fine *mousse* and lovely complexity and grip on the long and very well-balanced finish. This is a very, very good bottle of 1976 bubbly. 2014-2030+. **92.**

Taittinger’s Comte de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut

Taittinger’s Tête de Cuvée, the Comtes de Champagne bottling, was first launched in the 1952 vintage, with the inaugural vintage released in 1957. It is one of the greatest wines made in Champagne. The Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs is a very remarkable wine, as it often will offer up a bit more generosity in its early days than many of the other Grande Marques’ Tête de Cuvées, due to its one hundred percent chardonnay composition, and yet it ages as well as the very longest-lived wines of this category, such as Krug Grande Cuvée, Krug Vintage, Clos des Goisses, Cristal and Dom Perignon. Comtes de Champagne is made up entirely of first press juice, produced from grapes exclusively grown in the grand cru vineyards in the Côte des Blancs villages of Avize, Cramant, Chouilly and Mesnil-sur-Oger. Once the juice is pressed, the *vins clairs* are transferred to the *Crayères* cellars underneath the former Sainte Niçaise Abbey (razed during the French Revolution), which date all the way back to Roman times. The site of these cellars, which are exclusively used for the Comtes de Champagne cuvées, were originally used as chalk mines commencing in the fourth century, and were then used as a crypt and wine cellars for the Benedictine Abbey once it was constructed above them in the twelfth century. They are classic Roman mines from this time, constructed in pyramidal shape, so that the mines would be

structurally sound. Along with Taittinger, the neighboring houses of Charles Heidsieck, Veuve Clicquot and Pommery et Greno are the only *Grandes Marques* to have these breathtakingly beautiful and perfect aging facilities for their wines. The monks excavated and extended these chalk mines into a maze of deep galleries and tunnels, and these provide perfect storage conditions for the Comtes de Champagne. Appropriately enough, the family of the Counts of Champagne were the benefactors for the Sainte Niçaise Abbey in its formative years, making these cellars ideal for the aging of a wine named after them.

Since the 1988 vintage, a small percentage of the Comtes de Champagne is aged in small, new French oak barrels to add greater depth and dimension to the cuvée. As Taittinger's *Chef de Cave*, Loïc Dupont emphasizes, the goal was not to "add the taste of oak or make the wine more toasty" by the use of a bit of new oak during the élevage period, but simply "to produce a more complete and complex wine." Depending on the vintage, between five and six percent of the wines earmarked for the Comtes de Champagne will be raised in these barrels, and these wines add to the breadth of the palette that Monsieur Dupont has to work with when making the final blend for the Taittinger Tête de Cuvée. The majority of the grapes used in the Comtes de Champagne come from Taittinger's own vineyard holdings in the grand cru villages of the Côte des Blancs, which are augmented by several long-standing contracts that the house has with some of the best growers in the region. The Taittinger family values its relations with the growers with which they have worked over the years, and doubtlessly, the growers whose grapes contribute to the blend of the Comtes de Champagne take pride in knowing that this great cuvée is partially built upon their grapes. The wine is aged for four to six years in bottle prior to its release, and then of course offers up another thirty to fifty years of profound drinkability after it enters into the market. As great as the wine can be in its youth, it is a mistake in my opinion to not allow it a good fifteen to twenty years out from the vintage to reach its magical zenith.

2005 Taittinger Comte de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut

The 2005 Comtes de Champagne is an outstanding example of the vintage, offering up a deep and youthful nose of apple, pear, chalky minerality, gentle notes of acacia blossoms, a touch of creosote, *pain grillé* and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and complex, with a great core of fruit, pinpoint bubbles, great focus and grip and a very long, refined and perfectly balanced finish. The last time I tasted this wine, with Clovis Taittinger here in New York a year ago, I thought it was fairly open for a young vintage of Comtes de Champagne, but the wine has seemingly firmed up structurally in the interim, and I would now keep it tucked away in the cellar for another five or six years and really let it blossom. 2020-2050+. **95.**

2004 Taittinger Comte de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut

Like so many of the top 2004 bottlings from Champagne, the '04 Comtes de Champagne is showing all the signs of a very long life of utterly classic evolution for this bottling. At our vertical here in New York in October, the wine was showing great potential, as it wafts from the glass in a blossoming mélange of pear, white peach, very complex, chalky minerality, brioche, a touch of vanilla bean, orange zest, discreet floral tones and a lovely, smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, and racy, with a very fine core, laser-like focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and great cut and bounce on the very long and still fairly youthful finish. Comtes de Champagne is always so well-balanced out of the blocks, that it always seems accessible, but

this wine really deserves at least a solid handful of more years of bottle age before starting to drink, as it is only at the outset of its vinous journey. 2018-2045+. **95+**.

2002 Taittinger Comte de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut

The 2002 Comtes has been a legend in the making since its first release, and at age twelve, the wine is starting to really stretch its wings and aim for the stars. The utterly brilliant nose is still a tad on the reticent side, but as the wine warms up in the glass, it offers up a stellar constellation of pear, delicious apples, complex chalkiness, brioche, apple blossoms, incipient notes of pastry cream, plenty of smokiness and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with stunning focus and balance, unrepentant refinement, elegant *mousse*, zesty acids and stunning cut and grip on the endless and dancing finish. I am hard-pressed to think of a finer young vintage of Comtes de Champagne that has ever crossed my path! It seems to me that it is still infanticide to be drinking this wine today, as there is so much more to unfold with more bottle age, and I would not touch a bottle until it starts to close in on its twentieth birthday. *Chapeau!* 2020-2075. **98.**

2000 Taittinger Comte de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut

I have always liked the 2000 vintage of Comtes de Champagne, and this most recent bottle at our vertical was absolutely singing. The pure and vibrant nose wafts from the glass in a wide open blend of pear, peach, creosote, complex, limestone minerality, blossoming notes of nuttiness, orange peel, brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really starting to get into its apogee of peak drinkability, with lovely mid-palate concentration, elegant *mousse*, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, pure, vibrant and wide open finish. This wine has now reached its plateau of maturity, but it will be here for many decades and there is clearly no rush to be drinking the wine, but it is ready and an awfully fine glass of Blanc de Blancs at the present time. 2014-2035+. **94+**.

1999 Taittinger Comte de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut

The 1999 Comtes de Champagne is a lovely bottle of wine that is now drinking very well. Given how ripe the '99 vintage was in Champagne, the elegance and structural integrity of this bottling is most impressive, as it offers up an utterly classic bouquet of pear, delicious apple, a touch of tangerine, *crème patissière*, incipient notes of nutskin, glorious chalkiness, brioche and a classically smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with excellent mid-palate intensity, bright acids, excellent focus and *mousse* and lovely grip on the long, complex and wide open finish. This is a touch more broad-shouldered than the equally fine 2000 Comtes, and the two vintages make lovely bookends. 2014-2035+. **94.**

1998 Taittinger Comte de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut

The 1998 vintage of Comtes de Champagne has not closed down quite as much in the last year as some of the other *Têtes de Cuvées* that I have tasted from this vintage, and it remains quite open and showing lovely generosity on the palate. The classic nose is complex and *à point*, wafting from the glass in a mélange of pear, tangerine, almonds, a beautiful base of white soil tones, warm bread, gentle floral tones and a topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and very refined, with fine intensity of flavor at the core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the pure and vibrant finish. The raw materials in 1998 were probably not quite as fine as those in either 1999 or 2000, but the 1998 Comtes de Champagne shows no signs of not being able to keep pace with those two other excellent vintages. 2014-2035. **94.**

1996 Taittinger Comte de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut

This most recent bottle of 1996 Comtes de Champagne was showing brilliantly and this is clearly one of the legendary vintages of this fine cuvée in the last quarter century. The stunning nose delivers a magical constellation of pear, passion fruit, brioche, very complex, chalky minerality, spring flowers, nutmeg, pastry cream and a touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and bottomless, with racy focus and grip, a superb core, perfect balance and blossoming complexity and enormous energy on the very, very long, laser-like finish. The vintage's snappy acids are perfectly integrated into the body of the wine, and this is one 1996 that will not fail of the vintage's early promise and the '96 Comtes is destined to be a legendary rendition of this great wine. It is certainly approachable today, but I would be inclined to give it just a few more years' worth of bottle age to allow its tertiary layers to start to emerge and add to its stunning complexity. 2016-2060+. **97+**.



1995 Taittinger Comte de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut

The more I taste the top wines from the 1995 vintage in Champagne, the more I am convinced that this too is a vintage of legendary quality. The '95 Comtes is a touch more classic in profile than the otherworldly 1996, but it too is a brilliant bottle, as it soars from the glass in blend of delicious apples, pears, toasted almonds, orange zest, *crème patissière*, plenty of smokiness and exotic spice elements in the upper register that are redolent of both fresh nutmeg and saffron. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and delivers stunning depth at the core,

with superb focus and balance, refined *mousse*, bright, zesty acids and stunning length and grip on the soil-driven and brilliantly complex finish. A great, great wine. 2014-2040. **96.**

1990 Taittinger Comte de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut

I have had the good fortune to drink a few bottles of the 1990 Comtes de Champagne in the last couple of years, and the wine has always shown itself to be one of the freshest and most impressive examples of the vintage out there for current consumption. This most recent bottle at our vertical tasting in October was stellar, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of baked pears and apples, nutty overtones, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, brioche, a touch of leesiness, orange zest and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and absolutely at its apogee, with a rock solid core of fruit, still exceptional *mousse*, great focus and grip and a very, very long, vibrant and complex finish. A stellar 1990 Champagne! 2014-2035. **95.**

Sec

Michel Lorient “Les Mutines Marie-Léopold” Sec NV (Festigny) Disgorged Feb. 2014

Michel Lorient’s Les Mutines Sec bottling is comprised of a blend of eighty percent pinot meunier and twenty percent chardonnay and had a *dosage* of twenty grams per liter. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of peach, lilacs, lovely minerality, a bit of brioche and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite bracing, with a fine core, superb mineral drive, snappy acids, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the very slightly sweet finish. The combination of the strong acidity and the superb backend minerality tend to devour most of the residual sweetness, so that the wine seems to be carrying less than twenty grams per liter of residual sugar. A fine bottle. 2014-2025. **91.**

Extra Brut and Brut Nature NV

Ulysses Collin “Perrière” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Disgorged March 2012)

The base year on this lovely Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs is 2008. The wine delivers a superb bouquet of pears, brioche, clementines, a fine base of limestone minerality, hints of the pastry cream to come with further bottle age and a nice topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very minerally in personality, with a lovely core, very refined *mousse*, brisk acids and fine focus and mineral drive on the long and complex finish. The backend closes with just a touch of butteriness from the barrel-fermentation of some or all of the *vins clairs* here. Fine and very well-balanced juice. 2014-2030. **92+.**

Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (Base Year 2010)

The current release of Monsieur Laval’s basic bottling from Cumières is base year 2010, and after not having tried this back in the preparation for the Champagne feature in Issue 51, I was very happy to cross paths with a bottle in August of this year. The wine is Monsieur Laval’s customary blend for this cuvée of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier, with the wine spending three and a half years on the fine lees prior to disgorgement. Ten percent of the blend is from the 2009 vintage and the wine received no *dosage*. The very complex bouquet is superb, delivering a very classy mélange of apple, pear, almond, complex soil tones, a touch of butter, dried flowers and brioche. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with great cut and grip, a rock solid core, impeccable focus and balance and stunning mineral drive on the very, very long and youthful finish. The *mousse* here is very elegant, and though this wine is already quite tasty, I would be inclined to give it a few more years in the cellar and really let it blossom. 2014-2035+. **93+.**

Georges Laval “Les Hautes Chèvres” (Base Year 2008) Brut Nature (Cumières)

In effect, this is a 2008 vintage wine, but I have not listed it as such in this article, as the vintage date does not appear on the front label. As readers may recall from Issue 51 and my visit to Vincent Laval in Cumières, the 2008 is the penultimate vintage for this bottling to be made from the very old pinot noir vines grown in this vineyard, as they were grubbed up after the 2009 harvest. From the 2010 vintage forwards, the Les Hautes Chèvres bottling will change its stripes a bit, moving from a one hundred percent pinot noir bottling to a one hundred percent pinot meunier bottling, from a parcel of very old vines that lie in the same *lieu à dit* as the pinot noir vines were planted in, just a bit further down the slope. In any case, the 2008 version is still these very old pinot noir vines, and it is a beautiful bottle of bubbly, offering up scents of apple, pear, hazelnuts, a very complex base of soil tones, citrus peel, a touch of vanilla and a topnote of brioche. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a great core of fruit, very refined *mousse*, brisk acids and stunning length and grip on the pure and laser-like finish. A beautiful, beautiful wine in the making. 2016-2040. **94+**.

Michel Lorient “Palmyre” Brut Nature NV (Festigny) Disgorged December 2013

Michel Lorient’s non-vintage Brut Nature bottling, which he calls “Palmyre” is comprised of a blend of seventy percent pinot meunier and thirty percent chardonnay and spent four years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The base wines are a combination of 2008 and 2009 vintages, so this has some very strong raw materials and the wine does not fail of its promise. The bouquet is absolutely superb, soaring from the glass in a complex blend of tart pear, a touch of almond paste, brioche, beautiful minerality and a gardenful of meunier floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, very elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a beautiful wine that handles its zero *dosage* with great style and does not lose any mid-palate generosity or poise on the backend from the absence of residual sweetness. Very impressive. 2014-2025. **92**.

Clément Perseval Premier Cru Brut Nature (Chamery) Disgorged January 2013

The current release of non-vintage Brut Nature from Clément Perseval is an absolutely superb bottle of bubbly. The *cépages* is a blend of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier, and the wine offers up an outstanding and quite complex nose of apple, white peach, warm bread, complex soil tones, a touch of hazelnut and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and utterly refined, with very elegant *mousse*, lovey focus and balance, a superb core and a long, suave and very poised finish. This was my first taste of any of Monsieur Perseval’s wines, and I was extremely impressed from this small grower on the Montagne de Reims. 2014-2030+. **92+**.

Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut

Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Épernay)

The Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV is a very fine example, but I have a slight preference of this house’s blended non-vintage Brut, as the substantial percentage of pinot meunier in that wine is really quite appealing. In any case, the Blanc de Blancs hails entirely from grand cru vineyards and spent three years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The current release is bright and complex on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, white flowers, chalky soil tones, a touch of pastry cream and a dollop of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with elegant *mousse*, a fine

core and very good length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. This is very good today, but will be even better with another year's worth of bottle age. 2014-2025+. **90+**.

Claude Genet "Cuvée Prestige" Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV (Chouilly)

This was the first wine I have ever tasted from Claude Genet and the wine was quite good. The bouquet showed a touch of reduction when first poured, but blew off to reveal a blend of apple, lemon, chalky minerality, bread dough and a dollop of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and youthfully frothy, with a solid core, snappy acids and good length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This needs a year more of bottle age to start to relax structurally, but it is a good, solid wine. 2015-2030. **90+**.

Champagne Paul Goerg Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru Brut NV (Vertus)

Champagne Paul Goerg ages their non-vintage Blanc de Blancs a minimum of three years on the lees prior to disgorgement, so this is probably primarily 2010 base wine. The wine has a *dosage* of eight grams per liter and offers up an excellent nose of pear, apple, chalky minerality, warm biscuits and white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is drinking very well today, but will be even better with another year or two of bottle age. 2014-2025+. **90**.

D. Henriët-Bazin Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru Brut NV (Villers-Marmery)

The current release of the D. Henriët-Bazin non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is a very good wine that is very young still today, and I would be inclined to try and tuck it away in the cellar for a year or two and let it blossom a bit more from behind its racy structural elements. The bouquet is first rate, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, tart pear, stony minerality, fresh-baked bread and a nice dollop of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and youthfully complex, with a fine core, snappy acids, refined *mousse* and very good length and grip on the still very primary finish. Today, the wine is still a touch angular from its relative youth, but this will go away with a bit more bottle age and this should be a lovely drink down the road. 2015-2025+. **90+**.

Non-Vintage Blanc de Noirs

Michel Lorient "Authentic Meunier" Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Festigny)

The new release of Michel Lorient's non-vintage Blanc de Noirs was disgorged in November of 2013 and received a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. As the name of the cuvée implies, the wine is comprised entirely of pinot meunier and offers up a beautifully refined and complex nose of apple, white peach, a touch of fresh nutmeg, lovely floral tones, chalky soil and a nice base of brioche. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and delivers excellent mid-palate depth, with crisp acids, very refined *mousse* and superb balance on the long, focused and zesty finish. This is supremely elegant, like all of Monsieur Lorient's wines, and I really like the early generosity provided here by the slightly more generous *dosage*. High, high class juice. 2014-2030+. **92+**.

Non-Vintage Brut

Besserat de Bellefon "Cuvée des Moines" Brut NV (Épernay)

The current release of the Besserat de Bellefon "Cuvée des Moines" non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of forty-five percent pinot meunier, thirty-five percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot noir and was aged fully three years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The wine offers up a complex and classy bouquet of apple, fresh-baked bread, gentle smokiness, a

lovely base of soil and the gentle, understated floral tones of pinot meunier, which in this case are a bit reminiscent of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, very elegant *mousse*, excellent focus and complexity and a long, crisp and refined finish. All the Cuvée des Moines bottlings from Besserat de Bellefon are made in a *Crémant* style that is about one atmosphere lower in pressure than standard Champagne, and this adds a fine sense of elegance on the palate of this new release. Fine juice. 2014-2025+. **92.**

André Beaufort “Brut Réserve” Grand Cru (Ambonnay) Disgorged October 2012

As is customary for the Beaufort family’s lovely wines, this particular release carries an identifying lot number, which in this case is “Lot BGC”. The wine is comprised of a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay and offers up a superb bouquet of apple, pear, stylish nuttiness, brioche, a fine base of stony minerality and a signature topnote of musky floral tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely *mousse*, excellent mineral drive and fine focus and grip on the long and classy finish. This is high class juice that is just starting to blossom and still has plenty of years of development before it. 2014-2030+. **92.**

Bernard Brémont “Cuvée Prestige” Brut NV (Ambonnay) 2013 Release

The Brémont family’s Cuvée Prestige has always aged quite well in my experience, and the additional year’s bottle age on this wine has allowed it to blossom nicely and really start to drink with sophistication and generosity. The bouquet is a superb blend of apple, warm bread, a touch of tangerine, complex soil tones, a nice dollop of smokiness and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with fine *mousse*, lovely focus and balance, bright acids and excellent grip on the elegant and very long finish. I have always thought of Ambonnay as pinot noir territory, but as readers will recall, the Brémont Cuvée Prestige is comprised of two-thirds chardonnay and one-third pinot noir, and yet it is a quintessential expression of this lovely village. High class juice. 2014-2030. **93.**

Paul Clouët Brut Selection NV (Bouzy) Disgorged November 2013

The Champagne house of Paul Clouët has changed their colorful labels with their new releases, which I have some mixed emotions about, as the new labels are really quite elegant and lovely, but the brightly colored ones of the past certainly stood out in a crowd and I imagine that I will feel more nostalgic for them as the years go by. In any event, the new release of the Brut Selection behind the label is excellent, offering up a fine blend of apple, pear, bread dough, a lovely base of soil tones and a dollop of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with excellent mid-palate depth, lovely *mousse* and a long, zesty and focused finish. The *cépages* of the new bottling is comprised of forty percent pinot noir (from Bouzy), thirty percent chardonnay (Chouilly) and thirty percent pinot meunier from the Aube. A fine bottle of non-vintage Brut. 2014-2030. **90+.**

Paul Clouët Brut “Grand Cru” NV (Bouzy) Disgorged November 2013

The new release of the Grand Cru Brut from Paul Clouët is quite different in *cépages* from the Brut Selection bottling, as this wine includes eighty percent Bouzy pinot noir and twenty percent Chouilly chardonnay, with no pinot meunier in the blend. I like the wine very much, but it is a touch old-fashioned in style, with its nine grams per liter of *dosage* a touch evident on the backend. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite Bouzy in personality, offering up scents of apple, peach, brioche, lovely nutty tones and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows some lovely secondary layers of complexity, with a good core of fruit, refined *mousse*, sound acids and fine focus and balance on the complex and succulent finish. This shows a bit of age already, with the nutty tones precursors to more fully

oxidative nuances, so this is probably best drunk over the coming decade. Good juice. 2014-2025. **90+**.

Paul Clouët Brut “Prestige” NV (Bouzy) Disgorged November 2013

The *cépages* of the Brut Prestige from Champagne Paul Clouët mirrors that of the Grand Cru bottling, with its eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, with the wine a blend of fruit from the 1999 and 2000 vintages. I really like this wine, which is more vibrant than the above and shows off more mineral drive on the backend of the palate. The outstanding bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of apple, white peach, brioche, a dollop of fresh almond, plenty of smokiness and a very complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with zesty acids, great focus and grip, very refined *mousse* and outstanding length on the very mineral finish. I notice that the Brut Prestige’s *dosage* is a bit lower, at seven grams per liter, and perhaps this contributes a bit to the superb perception of minerality on the palate here. Fine, fine juice. 2014-2030+. **92+**.

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Damery)

I am a very big fan of the wines from Fabrice Gass, whose side project, Champagne Alexandre Filaine, does not distract him from his day job as a winemaker at Bollinger. I do not get to taste Monsieur Gass’s wines with any regularity, as he only owns very small parcels of vineyard land, which in total comprise a tad less than one hectare. He is located in the village of Damery, which lies next door to Cumières, where the southern Montagne de Reims transitions into the Marne River valley. His wines are barrel fermented in very old barrels, with indigenous yeasts and the Cuvée Spéciale is aged three years on the lees prior to *dégorgement*. The new release, which is primarily from the superb 2010 vintage, is a dynamite wine, soaring from the glass in a very precise aromatic blend of apple, pear, fresh-baked bread, marvelously complex minerality, orange peel, smoke and just a whisper of butteriness from those very old barrels. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely rock solid at the core, with great cut and grip (no malo here!), elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the snappy and very soil-driven finish. This is great juice. 2014-2030+. **94**.

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Confidence” Brut NV (Damery)

Fabrice Gass is making brilliant bubbly, and I only wish he had a bit more vineyard land to work with, as the world could certainly use more bottles of his wines. His Cuvée Confidence is a blend of forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot meunier and spends fully five years in the cellars aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The wine is aged under cork, rather than crown cap during this five year hibernation period. This bottling does not undergo any malolactic fermentation, and if my math is correct, this is primarily base year 2008. The wine is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a constellation of apple, pear, hazelnuts, beautifully complex soil tones, brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and shows off a lovely core of fruit, with excellent balance, frothy *mousse* and a very, very long and elegant finish. This is fine, fine juice, but perhaps the Cuvée Spéciale is just a tad more laser-like in its focus? 2014-2030. **93+**.

D. Henriët-Bazin “Sélection de Parcelles” Brut NV Premier Cru (Villers-Marmery)

The current release of the Henriët-Bazin “Sélection de Parcelles” non-vintage Brut was disgorged in June of 2013 and is comprised of a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of apple, peach, warm biscuits, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and slightly oxidative in style, with a good core of fruit, very refined *mousse*, crisp acids and a long, complex finish

that shows some influence from reserve wines. Stylistically, this is a bit oxidative along the lines of the old Bollinger non-vintage Brut, though done in a more medium-full style. Good juice in its style, but it may be a touch too oxidative for some palates. 2014-2025. **89.**



Chardonnay vines under the summer sun in Mesnil-sur-Oger.

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 has now been in the market for a year and is really starting to blossom beautifully. I last tasted this bottling about a year ago, where it was still pretty tightly-knit, but an additional year of bottle age has allowed this wine to really start to sing, as it offers up a deep and very classy bouquet of apple, lovely and complex minerality, a touch of tangerine, brioche, white flowers and a topnote of lemon zest. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and full-bodied, with a lovey core, frothy *mousse*, crisp, well-integrated acids and excellent length and grip on the perfectly balanced and dancing finish. As is always the case with Lanson, time has worked its magic here and the wine has really opened up on both the nose and palate and it is quite clear that I underrated this a bit last year. 2014-2030. **91+.**

Lanson “Extra Age” Brut NV (Reims) Disgorged March 2013

It has again been about a year since I last crossed paths with Lanson’s fine bottling called “Extra Age”, and the new release has really started to drink well since its arrival in the market in the spring. The wine offers up a deep, complex and very refined bouquet of apple, wheat toast, a

bit of sweet quince, a superbly complex base of soil, a gentle touch of nuttiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with excellent focus and grip, refined *mousse*, lovely mineral drive and a very long, poised and balanced finish. This is high class juice. 2014-2035. **93.**

Michel Lorient “Patrimony” Brut NV (Festigny) Disgorged February 2013

The new release of Michel Lorient’s “Patrimony” non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of seventy percent pinot meunier and thirty percent chardonnay. The wine offers up a pure and beautifully floral bouquet of apple, white peach, musky meunier floral tones, bread dough, lovely soil nuances and a touch of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and superbly focused, with a fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, crisp, youthful acidity and lovely length and grip on the complex and minerally finish. This is really a lovely bottle of non-vintage Brut. 2014-2030. **92.**

Non-Vintage Brut Rosé

Barnaut “Rosé Authentique” Grand Cru Brut NV (Bouzy) 2013 Release

Last year’s release of the Barnaut “Rosé Authentique” non-vintage Brut has blossomed beautifully since I last crossed paths with a bottle and is drinking with great style at the present time. The bright and quite complex nose wafts from the glass in a vibrant mélange of blood orange, strawberries, rye bread, lovely soil tones, a touch of clove-like spices and a nice touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the classy finish. A really lovely bottle of Brut Rosé with personality to burn! 2014-2025+. **92.**

Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Brut Rosé NV (Épernay)

The Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Brut Rosé is made up of a blend of forty percent pinot meunier and thirty percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir, with the wine spending three years resting on its lees prior to disgorgement. The current bottling is lovely, with its pale salmon color and its vibrant bouquet of white cherries, melon, rye toast, lovely soil tones, a bit of orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and very well-balanced finish. Fine juice, with a judicious *dosage* and lovely focus and elegance. 2014-2025. **91.**

Paul Clouët Brut Rosé NV (Bouzy) Disgorged November 2013

The Paul Clouët Brut Rosé is another blend of eighty percent Bouzy pinot noir and twenty percent Chouilly chardonnay, with twelve percent of the pinot noir being still wine. The wine offers up a lovely nose of tangerine, smoke, rye toast, chalky soil tones and a lovely spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with fine concentration at the core, elegant *mousse* and a long, crisp and very nicely balanced finish. A fine bottle of Brut Rosé. 2014-2025. **90.**

D. Henriët-Bazin Grand Cru Brut Rosé NV (Villers-Marmery) Disgorged June 2013

The current release of Henriët-Bazin’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is still a relatively young wine and should nicely blossom with another year’s worth of bottle age. The wine is quite deep ruby in color and the young and quite vinous nose offers up scents of cherries, pomegranate, rye toast, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite crisp, with a fine core, slightly coarse *mousse* and a long, focused and snappy finish. This is a bit bound up in its structure today, but will be lovely once it has a chance to emerge from behind its girdle of acidity and really start to drink with a bit more generosity. 2015-2025+. **90+.**

Lanson Brut Rosé NV (Reims)

The current release of Lanson's non-vintage Brut is really a fine bottle, wafting from the glass in a mélange of tangerine, *fraises du bois*, wheat toast, excellent minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, excellent balance, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the zesty and refined finish. This is drinking very well in its youth, particularly for a non-malolactic wine, and this has to be one of the great sleepers in the market for high class and ageworthy non-vintage Brut Rosé. 2014-2025+. **91+**.

Michel Lorient Theodorine “Les Mutines” Brut Rosé NV (Festigny) Disgorged Feb 2014

The new release of Michel Lorient's Theodorine Les Mutines non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of forty-five percent pinot meunier, forty percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot noir. The wine is a lovely salmon color and wafts from the glass in a complex and classy aromatic mélange of blood orange, cherries, clove-like spice tones, a lovely base of soil, rye bread and orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and zesty, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, youthful and dancing finish. This particular bottle was just a touch reduced when I first opened it, but blossomed beautifully once it had a chance to breath and offered up excellent drinking out of the blocks and the structure to age gracefully for at least the next decade. 2014-2025+. **92**.

Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs

2008 D. Henriët-Bazin “Cuvée Marie-Amélie” Blanc de Blancs Fleurs de Vigne Brut

The 2008 D. Henriët-Bazin “Cuvée Marie-Amélie” is a lovely bottle of Blanc de Blancs, which was disgorged in July of 2013 and is starting to really drink very well today. The pure and vibrant bouquet offers up a constellation of pear, almond, brioche, a superbly complex base of soil tones, spring flowers and just a touch of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, refined *mousse*, fine focus and a long, quite open and classy finish. Lovely juice that is just starting to drink well (like so many of the 2008s, which are blossoming beautifully today), but with years and years of life still ahead of it. Fine juice. 2014-2030. **92**.

2004 Michel Lorient “les Sources du Flagot” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut (Festigny)

Michel Lorient's 2004 “les Sources du Flagot” spends three years resting on its fine lees, or as Monsieur Lorient likes to say, “ageing in music”, and the wine was finished off with six grams per liter of *dosage*. The bouquet is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex mix of white peach, apple, warm biscuits, chalky minerality, plenty of smokiness and a nice topnote of hazelnut. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the youthful and very promising finish. This still needs a few more years of bottle age to fully blossom, but it is starting to drink very well and is going to be stellar when it is fully ready. 2016-2035. **93**.

1983 Salon (Mesnil-sur-Oger) served from magnum

This magnum of 1983 Salon was very interesting, in that it was purchased upon release by our host and cellared impeccably, and to my palate, was in an absolutely superb place for current consumption. However, it was served at my friend's fiftieth birthday celebration, with at least thirty well-seasoned wine lovers in attendance, and most folks did not care for the wine, finding it too oxidative at this point in its evolution. The wine is, after all, thirty-one years of age and it is not out of place to be a bit oxidative in its profile at this point in its life, and the gently golden color was not advanced for its age. The bouquet is a deep, nutty and complex mélange of

backed apples and peaches, warm biscuits, almonds, just a touch of remaining *crème patissière* and a nice base of almost briny soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impressively zesty for its age, with a fine core, still quite vigorous *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and tertiary finish. I quite enjoyed this wine, as the acids are still quite sound, the bubbles have plenty of lift and the wine is still long and focused on the palate, despite some oxidative elements to the flavors and aromatics. Fully mature, but still drinking with plenty of style, albeit, not a legendary vintage of Salon. 2014-2022+. **92.**

1966 Krug Blanc de Blancs Brut

This was not a totally pristine bottle of the super rare, 1966 Krug Blanc de Blancs, but the wine was still a complete joy to drink and a once in a lifetime experience to share. Many thanks to well know New York wine merchant, Jean-Luc le Du for sharing the bottle! The origins of this particular example of the extremely rare 1966 Blanc de Blancs from Krug hail from a very well-known, long-time wine collecting family here in New York, who have been amassing the family cellar for fully three generations, and sometime back in the 1970s, they acquired a full case of this lovely wine. It first came to Monsieur le Du's attention back in 1999, when he helped inventory the family's extensive collection, at which time, eight bottles out of that original case still existed in the cellar. Five or six years ago, three of these very rare bottles were sent off to auction, with two of the bottles deemed a bit too dark in color for the sale, and one of these two bottles found their way to our table this past October. This particular bottle had relinquished all of its *mousse*, but retained marvelous complexity at nearly fifty years of age, offering up a deep and nutty bouquet of peach, walnuts, apricot, new leather, a lovely base of soil, orange peel and an almost a Sherry-like *flor* tone in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with plenty of nuttiness, still sound acids and a very long, well-balanced and classy finish. There was no remaining *mousse*, but this did not spoil the enjoyment of the wine. I imagine that this particular bottle was more advanced than a pristine example might be today, but it was a great treat to finally be able to have a taste of this mythical wine. I will hold out hope that I might one day cross paths with a perfect bottle of this rare wine, and not score this obviously slightly advanced example! But, that said, even in its less than perfect condition, this wine will remain one of the most memorable and historic bottles of old Champagne I have ever had the pleasure to taste. 2014-2030+?

Vintage-Dated Brut and Extra Brut

2009 Laherte Frères "les Vignes d'Autrefois" Extra Brut Millésime (Chavot)

This was my first visit with the 2009 les Vignes d'Autrefois from Laherte Frères and the wine was showing beautifully, with the marriage of pinot meunier aromatics and gentle oak influences quite seamless on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a fine and classy blend of white peaches, lilacs, chalky soil tones, citrus peel and a gardenful of white flowers, with the oak influence creating subtle bass notes to all of the high end pinot meunier perfume. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and laser-like in its focus, with a fine core of fruit, frothy *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the long and still quite youthful finish. I very much like the early generosity that can be found in 2009 vintage Champagne, and here it works very well with the fine structural attributes of this bottling to make a wine that is accessible out of the blocks, but which will age with great style. 2014-2030+. **92+.**

2008 Marguet Père et Fils "Amboniacus" Extra Brut Millésime (Ambonnay)

The Amboniacus cuvée is a new name for the vintage bottling from Benoit Marguet, with the vast majority of the fruit for this bottling hailing from Ambonnay, as Amboniacus is the

name of the Roman soldier of ancient times from which the village derived its name. The 2008 Amboniacus is a blend of sixty-two percent pinot noir and thirty-eight percent chardonnay, with everything barrel-fermented in mostly older barrels (Benoit is using a ten year barrel rotation for this wine, so ten percent will be new in any given vintage) and the wine going through full malolactic fermentation. All of the vineyards are being farmed *biodynamically* for this bottling, with the certification for the parcels due in the next year or two. The 2008 Amboniacus spent four and a half years on its fine lees prior to *dégorgement* and was disgorged in September of 2013. The bouquet is flat out stunning, soaring from the glass in a blaze of apple, pear, smoke, brioche, fresh almonds and a stunningly complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and vibrant, with crisp acids, laser-like focus, a lovely core, elegant *mousse* and a very, very long, refined and complex finish. This is a beautiful wine that is already quite accessible, due to its impeccable balance, but it is still really early on in its evolution and further bottle age will be repaid handsomely. Another stellar new release from Benoit Marguet! 2014-2035. **94.**

2007 Michel Lorient “Monodie en Meunier Majeur” VV Extra Brut (Festigny) Disg. 11/2013

The 2007 “Monodie en Meunier Majeur” from Michel Lorient is a superb bottle of youthful bubbly, which I assume is designed to show the potential longevity of a solely pinot meunier cuvée, as this wine is deep, structured and destined for a long life in bottle. The still quite primary bouquet shows loads of potential in its focused constellation of white peach, brioche, chalky minerality, a whisper of fresh nutmeg and meunier’s beautiful floral tones. On the palate the wine is focused, beautifully balanced and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, snappy acids, pinpoint bubbles and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This wine has such lovely balance that it is eminently drinkable today, but I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for a few years and allow its secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. Lovely juice. 2016-2035. **92+.**

2006 Michel Lorient “Inspiration de Saison” Extra Brut (Festigny) Disgorged 6/2014

The 2006 Michel Lorient “Inspiration de Saison” Extra Brut is comprised of a blend of sixty percent pinot meunier and forty percent chardonnay and has a dosage of five grams per liter. The wine offers up a vibrant and classy bouquet of apple, tangerine, plenty of musky meunier floral tones, brioche, lovely soil tones and a whiff of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, excellent focus and grip, very elegant *mousse*, impressive complexity and a long, classy finish. This is a beautiful example of the vintage, with the dosage just sufficient to buffer the youthful structure seamlessly and allow terrific drinking out of the blocks. The wine will also age very well indeed. Fine, fine juice. 2014-2035. **93.**

2006 Philipponnat “Le Léon” Blanc de Noirs Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

The house of Philipponnat has just prepared for market two new cuvées of vintage-dated bubbly, both made entirely from pinot noir, to highlight this grape and, as Charles Philipponnat notes, “to demonstrate that it is possible to make supremely elegant Champagne solely from this grape variety.” I reported on the outstanding sister bottling to the Le Léon back in Issue 52, which is from vineyards in the village of Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, where the house is based and which I had a chance to taste during my visit to the *maison* at the end of March. I revisited that wine here in New York in October and it was every bit as superb as the bottle in Mareuil. The Le Léon bottling hails from fruit grown in the next door village of Aÿ, in the *lieu à dit* of the same name, and it is also outstanding. The bouquet on the 2006 Le Léon wafts from the glass in a blend of

white peach, orange zest, brioche, sweet almonds, a lovely base of complex soil nuances and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a fine core of fruit, refined *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the perfectly balanced and seamless finish. I would opt for giving this excellent new cuvée at least a few years to blossom and start to show some of its secondary layers of complexity. This is a very elegant wine of excellent promise! 2016-2035+. **93+**.

2005 André Beaufort Brut Millésime Grand Cru (Ambonnay) Disgorged July 2010

This particular bottle of André Beaufort Brut Millésime was marked as “Lot 05-A”, and apparently there are other disgorgement dates and lots of this wine also out there in the market. This particular cuvée of the ’05 offers up a fine and nicely evolving bouquet of peach, brioche, stony soil tones, plenty of smokiness and a topnote of both white flowers and other, more musky floral elements that are reminiscent of honeysuckle. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite crisp, with impressive generosity and complexity on the attack, a very good core, elegant *mousse* and a long, slightly chunky finish. This is quite a good drink today and is probably already at its apogee, so I would be inclined to drink it over the coming dozen years or so. 2014-2025+. **91+**.

2002 Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Brut Millésime (Épernay)

The 2002 Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Brut Millésime is a simply lovely example of this top flight vintage, and has to be one of the great sleepers still out there in the market from 2002. The bouquet is a deep, complex and very refined mélange of apple, white peach, brioche, a touch of almond paste, lovely minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and elegant, with tiny, pinpoint bubbles, a superb core and a very long, focused and complex finish. There is still just a whisper of youthful backend bitterness on the finish here that suggests a few more years’ worth of bottle age will be rewarded, but this is a lovely bottle from this fine year. 2014-2030+. **92+**.

2002 Bollinger “Grande Année” Brut Millésime (Aÿ) served from magnum

The 2002 Bollinger “Grande Année” is drinking quite nicely from magnum, offering up a superb and quite wide open bouquet of apple, quince, bread dough, smokiness and a lovely and quite complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with a still fairly youthful personality, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and fine length and grip on the focused finish. This wine is starting to come out from behind its structural elements and blossom, and it has now begun to drink at its plateau, though it still has decades of life ahead of it. 2014-2030+. **92+**.

1996 Bollinger “Grande Année” Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

The 1996 Bollinger “Grande Année” is drinking beautifully at age eighteen, with plenty of brightness and vibrancy now coupled to lovely, tertiary layers of complexity. The bouquet is a fine and *à point* constellation of peach, pear, brioche, a lovely base of soil and a bit of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite frothy, with a fine core, excellent focus and balance, refined *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the bright finish. There remains a very fine spine of acidity here that keeps the wine fresh and youthful in structure, and which augurs very well for its continued positive development in the cellar. 2014-2035. **93**.



1990 Dom Perignon

I had loved this vintage of Dom Perignon well enough out of the blocks to buy a case for long-term cellaring, and though the wine has been thoroughly enjoyable over the years, it seems to me that it is now time to drink it up in regular-sized bottle, as it has matured at a fairly brisk pace, and like a lot of 1990 Champagnes, it is already probably starting to look over the far side of its plateau. The wine today is already showing a bit oxidative in style, but with plenty of complexity and still good structure for current consumption, but it certainly seems likely to start to slide in the coming years. The bouquet is a mature blend of toasted nuts, apple, peach, a bit of honey, lovely, chalky soil tones and incipient notes of new leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still reasonably crisp, with fine focus, plenty of mid-palate stuffing, sound *mousse* and very good length and grip on the gently honeyed and fairly advanced finish. Given that other examples from the 1990 vintage, such as Clos des Goisses and Comtes de Champagne, are decidedly fresher than this wine, I would term this a bit of a disappointment, though this seems quite correct for the general vintage's stage of evolution today and the wine remains quite tasty in its slightly decrepit style. I should note that there are reports of quite a bit of bottle variation with the 1990 Dom Perignon, so perhaps there are still far better examples out there. However, I wish I had bought the 1985, rather than the 1990 for my own cellar! Drink up in regular-sized formats. 2014-2020+? **90.**

IN MEMORY OF JOE DOUGHERTY



Joe Dougherty, center, chatting with Noël Pinguet and Sasha Katsman at Domaine Huët in 2007.

In September of this year, Joe Dougherty, a dear friend of mine passed away suddenly and tragically, leaving behind a huge coterie of grieving friends and family throughout the world of wine. Joe was one of the most brilliant and compassionate people I have ever had the pleasure to know, and the hole that he left behind in many lives will probably never fully heal. A brilliant chemist by day, Joe's real passions were wine and food, and he was one of the most generous people I have ever known, sharing new discoveries and timeless old bottles with the same *joie de vivre* and opening horizons for friends old and new every chance he had. He liked to collect friends around his dinner table, with bottles aplenty scattered amongst the guests, while he sturdily manned the stoves and turned out world class *haute cuisine* (seemingly with one hand), while keeping pace with the mirthful tasters routinely gathered at his table. I last saw Joe just a few weeks before he died, and most characteristically, he was manning the grill at a friend's four (or was it five?) day bacchanal to celebrate a fiftieth birthday this past August, turning out several great meals for forty or fifty rotating guests in a movable feast *par excellence*, while seemingly managing to still taste everything of merit that was opened in the frenzied celebrations. Joe was probably best-known for his great love of the wines and food of the Loire Valley, not to mention its down to earth and absolutely lovable *vignerons*, and it is not surprising

that when I turned my attention to writing a proper historical feature on Domaine Huët in Vouvray back at the tail end of 2007, I asked Joe if he could put me in contact with the estate's new owner, Anthony Hwang, to arrange an extended visit to research the article. Joe graciously made introductions, and I was delighted when he accepted my invitation to join me at the domaine at the designated time, as he was truly the guiding light behind my long love affair with the wines of Domaine Huët. To give just a bit of insight into Joe's spirit (for those who did not know him personally), upon our returns to New York, Joe sent me an email to query what I had notes on from the estate for the article, and then organized a Domaine Huët tasting at his home to "fill in a few holes" as he liked to say, from his very deep collection of ancient Vouvrais.

Over the course of my more than thirty years professionally in the world of wine, I have had the great fortune to meet some of the finest individuals that the *vinous* universe has to offer, and my memories overflow at all of the great moments I have been fortunate enough to be part of over the decades and all of the many wonderful people that I have been able to come to know through my love of wine. It is clearly the greatest gift that we can ever receive from the grape. Amongst that long river of memories, some of the most poignant that continue alive with color and spirit are those which I had a chance to share with Joe Dougherty and his many friends. *Vignerons* knew and loved Joe, collectors from coast to coast in the US counted him amongst their dearest friends, and he was probably one of the most visible and thoughtful wine personalities to be found in the internet world of wine during its blossoming and coming of age. Joe was a man who loved wines of *terroir*, wherever they might be found, and it is not surprising, because he set down some mighty roots himself over the course of the fifty-four years that he roamed the soils of a life well-lived. We, that he left behind, have some beautiful soils still to till, thanks to Joe's munificent efforts over the course of his all too short time on this planet, and what we choose to do with the old vines he has left behind for us will be the true legacy of Joe Dougherty's life. For, perhaps in the end, a life is not measured by what we ourselves do with our time, but rather by what those that we touch end up doing during the course of theirs, in response to what we have shared with them in our moments together. In a world that is increasingly atomistic on so many levels, acquaintances are all too easy to come by, but good friends seem to be harder and harder to find. Joe was a good friend, and there are plenty of us out here now who will miss him until our own time comes along. I hope he has found peace in his next *stage* commensurate with the joy and light he brought to so many friends' lives during his first fifty-four here.

Words, of course, can never really do justice to a life so well-lived, much as a photograph can never really capture the inherent beauty in a sunset. One has to experience so many things firsthand to truly feel their beauty and their value. My greatest grief at Joe's untimely passing is that now there will be so many people who will never get to know the experience of sharing a moment or a glass with Joe personally. For if fate had been kinder, there is little doubt that the circle of Joe's friends would have continued to move out like ripples on the surface of the water, and the coming harvests would have been all that more fruitful with an ever larger number of ambassadors of the generosity of spirit and thoughtful insight that so much defined Joe's life. We'll all miss you Joe.