

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

September-October 2015

Number Fifty-Nine

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View From the Cellar is published bi-monthly by John Gilman, who is solely responsible for its content. Electronic subscriptions are available for \$120 per year (\$220 for two years), available at www.viewfromthecellar.com. Inquiries may also be emailed to john@viewfromthecellar.com. Copyright 2015 by John B. Gilman, all rights reserved. Content may be utilized by members of the wine trade and/or media as long as either View From the Cellar or John Gilman are fully credited. Please do not share.

BONNES-MARES
THE CROWN PRINCE OF CHAMBOLLE-MUSIGNY



Chambolle-Musigny's grand cru vineyard of Bonnes-Mares is one of the greatest vineyards in all of Burgundy, and yet, to my mind, it does not get anywhere near the proper respect it deserves. I have been visiting, drinking and cellaring Burgundy for several decades now, and over the years, I have begun (I think) to better understand the magic that is Bonnes-Mares, as well as to comprehend some of the reasons why a wine of such grandiose beauty manages to travel just a bit below the radar. For Bonnes-Mares is a wine whose inherent magic is often tightly locked up behind its structural elements in its youth, at least if it is made in a properly structured manner for long-term cellaring, which is of course the style that the wine is crafted in the cellars of the very finest proprietors with holdings in this vineyard. It lacks the early, flashy appeal of a wine like Richebourg or La Tâche, and in virtually every vintage, Bonnes-Mares is one of the slowest wines to unfold in the entire firmament of Burgundy, with decades of bottle age usually *de rigueur* to see the wine completely blossom, and yet, at its apogee, there are few wines that can match its combination of depth, complexity and aromatic refinement. However, it is emphatically a wine that requires patience and Burgundy tasting experience to fully grasp, and consequently, over the years that I have had the pleasure of

visiting and tasting in the Côte d'Or, I have come to the conclusion that Bonnes-Mares seems to be one of the most underrated of the region's great red wine grand crus.

Perhaps one of the reasons that Bonnes-Mares travels a bit under the radar today is that it is not entirely found in the village of Chambolle-Musigny, as roughly ten percent of the vines in this vineyard- 1.52 hectares out of its total expanse of 16.24 hectares (to use the most recent figures from the INAO, most books I own give it to be 15.06 hectares)- carries across the border into the village of Morey St. Denis, with nearly all of the Morey-based slice of Bonnes-Mares currently farmed by the Domaine Fougeray de Beauclair. It is possible that the sharing of a grand cru between these two differently-styled villages may seem to diminish the wine a touch in the eyes of some Burgundy collectors. Additionally, the personality of the wine of Bonnes-Mares does not seem entirely at home with the present day image of the wines of Chambolle-Musigny in general, as it is hard to reconcile the deep, structured and powerful style of young Bonnes-Mares with the qualification of Chambolle-Musigny as "home to the most elegant and perfumed red wines of the Côte de Nuits." Of course, forty or fifty years down the road, when Bonnes-Mares is still cruising along beautifully in a top vintage and is wide open for inspection, some of the elegance and perfume of Chambolle is indeed quite evident, but at the same time, it is never really a wine anywhere in its evolutionary arc of development where it truly fits the mold of what we think of today as quintessential Chambolle-Musigny. And for that matter, it is not really a wine that we could qualify as "more Morey St. Denis in character" either, as it seems perfectly content to defy classification and march on its merry and independent way. My kind of wine.

I remember vividly a conversation I had with Allen Meadows many years ago, as we were awaiting the start of a deep and varied tasting of Richebourg here in New York, where Allen suggested that if one were to group five grand cru red Burgundies at the very top of the hierarchy in the region, Richebourg would certainly take its place in that lofty set. I suggested that I would have to exclude Richebourg from that grouping in favor of Bonnes-Mares, as the wine was inherently a bit more complex and refined than Richebourg in my experience when the two wines had reached their respective apogees of peak maturity. Allen has probably thought that I was a bit daft since that day! That Richebourg tasting was nearly fourteen years to the day from the day that I am sitting at my desk writing this feature, and yet in the ensuing years, which have seen some absolutely brilliant bottles of Richebourg cross my path, I am still hard-pressed to give up on my championing Bonnes-Mares over several other grand crus such as Richebourg, despite the fact that conventional wisdom holds these others in higher esteem. For some of the very greatest mature red Burgundies that I have ever tasted have hailed from Bonnes-Mares, and I continue to strongly believe that if one is patient enough to allow a top flight example of Bonnes-Mares to truly reach its peak of maturity, then one is rewarded with a truly magical wine drinking experience that can very, very rarely be surpassed in the pantheon of red Burgundies. But, patience is the key, and that is not a commodity that one sees as regularly in the Burgundy circles of today as was probably the case a generation or two ago.

I first wrote a piece on the vineyard of Bonnes-Mares back before I gave up my commercial interests in the wine trade for a life as a full-time wine writer, and when I look back on what I wrote all those years ago, there are some elements of that old article that I might nuance differently today. For I have certainly had more experience with the wines from this superb vineyard since those days. But, despite a few misgivings about how some things may

have been phrased in that piece back in the day, the ensuing years have not seen any diminution in my absolute love for the wines of this great *terroir* and Bonnes-Mares remains one of my absolute favorite red wines in the world, as well as one that would rank in my own personal hierarchy at the very pinnacle of grand cru red Burgundy. The wine invariably, even in the plushest and most seductively-styled young vintages, starts out life bound up a bit in its structural elements, with broad shoulders, a firm chassis of tannin and its youthful personality most often defined by harnessed power, rather than snapshots of the refinement and complexity that will come in due course. In contrast, Musigny, Chambolle's far more heralded grand cru, is much easier to project out into the future when it is young, for though the wine is far more structured in its youth than many commentators understand, it is also supremely nuanced and refined as a young wine, with all of the facets of its ultimate complexity at maturity already neatly defined and sparkling in the young wine. This is not the case with Bonnes-Mares, which can often be quite reticent out of the blocks, with a sturdy structure, plenty of musculature, but also a rather four-square (in relative terms) primary personality that does not readily hint at what is to come in terms of aromatic and flavor complexity in the fullness of time.

While the vineyard of Bonnes-Mares straddles the commune division between Morey St. Denis and Chambolle-Musigny, more than ninety percent of this vineyard lies in Chambolle, and most commentators would consider it a grand cru of Chambolle-Musigny. The vineyard lies on the northern end of Chambolle-Musigny, at the extreme opposite side of the village from Musigny itself, and covers just over sixteen hectares between its 14.72 hectares in its Chambolle-Musigny sector and the 1.52 hectares that carry across the border into the southern end of Morey St. Denis. Its surface area is just slightly larger than Chambertin "Clos de Bèze" and a bit more than six hectares larger than Musigny. Interestingly, though one might intuitively think that there are important distinctions between the Morey side and the Chambolle side of the vineyard, there is actually very little difference between the *terroir* of the parcels lying immediately on either side of the commune boundary, but the vineyard of Bonnes-Mares is certainly characterized by two distinctly different *terroirs* to be found within the vineyard as a whole, with the line of demarcation cutting diagonally across the vineyard and creating two quite different sectors in terms of soil composition. One of these is known as the *Terres Blanches* section of the vineyard, and the other the *Terres Rouges* section, with neither of these two recognized under the auspices of the Appellation Contrôlée system set up in the 1930s, but both sectors readily acknowledged by *vignerons* in the region and quite easily spotted when one walks the vineyard in the winter and can see down to the two distinctively-colored topsoils that are found in each part of the grand cru.

The demarcation of the two different soil types cuts diagonally across the vineyard, but not corner to corner (Bonnes-Mares is pretty close to a rectangle in shape), with the *Terres Rouges* section found predominantly on the northern side of the vineyard towards Morey St. Denis. This sector is characterized by a higher clay and iron content than in the *Terres Blanches* side of the vineyard, and the combination of clay and iron in the topsoil here gives the soil its ruddy, orange-red hue from which this part of the vineyard takes its unofficial name. The *Terres Blanches* section has a much higher percentage of limestone and fossilized crustaceans in the soil, and is clearly far more chalky white in appearance than the *Terres Rouges* side when one walks about in the vineyard, and not surprisingly, these two distinct soil types can produce quite differently styled wines when tasted side by side. The *Terres Blanches* lies at the top of the

found, one from *Terres Rouges* and the other from *Terres Blanches* sectors. In this era, which lasted up until 1987, the domaine's American importer, Château and Estate, would select all of the *Terres Rouges* as their allocation of Bonnes-Mares, so that the remainder of the world had a Roumier *Terres Blanches* bottling of Bonnes-Mares. Consequently, by paying attention to the importer's strip label, it is possible to still compare the two soil types of Bonnes-Mares produced by the same methods in one of Burgundy's greatest cellars, if one can come across, for example, American and European bottles of the 1985 or 1986 Roumier Bonnes-Mares and taste them side by side.

Several of the top producers in Bonnes-Mares actually have parcels in both soil types, as does Domaine Roumier, so effectively, many of the examples of Bonnes-Mares that one tastes, with the notable exception of the Domaine de Comte de Vogüé, are a blend of the two soil types found in the vineyard. For example, Domaine Mugnier, Maison Joseph Drouhin, Domaine Dujac and others in the vineyard have vines planted on both soil types and their examples of Bonnes-Mares are (more or less) roughly half and half of the two soil types. Christophe Roumier, for several years, would not blend his two soil types of Bonnes-Mares until the second year of *elevage*, so that it was possible to taste and compare the *Terres Rouges* and *Terres Blanches* out of cask in his cellars, after which, he would prepare a blend of the two to taste out of barrel. Inevitably, the blend of the two soil types makes for the more complete wine, as each sector seems to fill in gaps the other might leave in the wine, so that the blend is always greater than the sum of its parts. However, this is not to say that the few examples of Bonnes-Mares that hail solely from either *Terres Rouges* or *Terres Blanches* are also not complete and compelling wines in their own right, as they are simply different than blended examples, but when one is tasting the constituent components in the Roumier cellars, it is hard not to be persuaded that the combination of the two soil types produces the most promising and complete young wine in terms of potential complexity and balance.

Many commentators have tried their hand at describing the differences between wines produced from the *Terres Rouges* or *Terres Blanches* sections of the vineyard, presumably from tasting the constituent components at Domaine Roumier, as this is the only address where I have ever been able to make a comparison between the two, as at all other domaines where I regularly taste Bonnes-Mares out of cask, either the two sectors are vinified together or are blended soon after the fermentation is completed, so as to allow the two components to more fully integrate earlier on in their *elevage*. Indeed, today, Christophe Roumier also blends most of his casks from each sector at the first racking, to better marry the two components early on, and only occasionally will keep a barrel of *Terres Rouges* and *Terres Blanches* separated, so as to be able to compare their evolutions in cask against the blended cuvée. In my experience, there is greater sappiness to the fruit component found in examples of Bonnes-Mares from the *Terres Rouges* section, as well as usually more black fruity elements to go along with the beautiful red fruit tones found in the vineyard. *Terres Rouges* wines also seem to have a bit more power out of the blocks, as well as more of a propensity here to larger game notes (venison versus the gamebirds of *Terres Blanches*), more of a smoky character in its youth and more violets to the rose petals of *Terres Blanches*. In contrast, pure *Terres Blanches* in the Roumier cellars tends to show a wine that is almost solely red fruity in personality, often with overtly citric elements such as blood orange, less mid-palate density of fruit, more racy minerality (from the higher limestone content) and more fresh herb and floral tones than found in young *Terres Rouges* examples. However,

this is simply the impression one has tasting the two soil types *chez* Roumier, and I should note that the description of the Roumier *Terres Blanches* would not be found for example, in the lovely Bonnes-Mares from Domaine Bart in Marsannay, which lies entirely above the Comte de Vogüé parcel of vines, on the southern side of the vineyard, and therefore which is planted almost in its entirety on *Terres Blanches*. So, these generalizations need to be taken in context.

The portion of Bonnes-Mares that lies in Morey St. Denis was retained by Bernard Clair, who kept it through the internecine strife which led to the dissolution of the former Domaine Clair-Daü and the sale of the vast majority of the family's vineyard holdings to Maison Louis Jadot in 1985 (though the Beaune-based *négociant* only ended up with .27 hectares of the domaine's extensive holdings in Bonnes-Mares). At the time of its dissolution, Domaine Clair-Daü was the largest single holder of vines in Bonnes-Mares. The Bernard Clair vines have been leased to Domaine Fougeray de Beauclair since the family domaine's breakup, making the Fougeray de Beauclair Bonnes-Mares the only one that hails exclusively from fruit grown within Morey St. Denis. In 2016, the lease on Bernard Clair's parcel of Bonnes-Mares will expire and the vines will move to his son, Bruno Clair. Bernard Clair's sister, who married Marsannay's Martin Bart, also kept her share of parcels from the old Domaine Clair-Daü in Bonnes-Mares (as well as her share of the family's Chambertin "Clos de Bèze"), but as these Bonnes-Mares parcels lie at the far other side of the vineyard above those of Comte de Vogüé, it is clear that back when Domaine Clair-Daü was producing their version of Bonnes-Mares, it too was made from a blend of *Terres Rouges* and *Terres Blanches*. In the Chambolle-Musigny section of Bonnes-Mares, the largest vineyard holders are today, in order, the Domaine du Comte de Vogüé (with 2.70 hectares- all on *Terres Rouges*), Domaine Drouhin-Laroze (1.49 hectares- predominantly *Terres Rouges*), Domaine Georges Roumier (1.39 hectares- about sixty percent on *Terres Blanches*), Domaine Bart (1.03 hectares- almost entirely *Terres Blanches*), Domaine Robert Groffier (.97 hectare), Domaine de la Vougeraie (.70 hectare), Domaine Bruno Clair (.63 hectare) and Domaine Dujac (.59 hectare- now hailing from one-third *Terres Blanches* and two-thirds *Terres Rouges*, though up until the addition of a small, fifteen *ares* parcel in 2005, this bottling was almost entirely from *Terres Rouges*). Two other of my favorite producers of Bonnes-Mares are amongst its smaller land holders (as they ended up splitting what was once a single section of vines, but that is another story), with Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier having .34 hectare and Maison Joseph Drouhin owning .23 hectare. Both of these estates have a near fifty-fifty split between the two soil types in the vineyard, with perhaps just a bit more *Terres Blanches* found in the Mugnier bottling.

As noted above, Bonnes-Mares is indeed a full-bodied and powerful wine. In the hands of the best *vignerons* it is a long-lived wine that is built to age, with plenty of structure, tannin and a notable austerity at the outset of life. However, much of what I read in books and other Burgundy-centric publications seems to pay short shrift to the relative merits of this great vineyard, and I have to disagree with much of what is written about Bonnes-Mares, as invariably, it is compared unfavorably to Musigny for what it is not, rather than celebrated for what it is. For example, Remington Norman in *Grand Cru* wrote in 2010 that Bonnes-Mares "produces a wine best described as substantial and heavy-framed." To my mind, quite a bit more could be said on the positive side of the ledger, but one has to have the patience to wait until it is truly ready to drink, as much of its inherent complexity and breed is often buried behind its structural elements when young. There are a few other grand crus that share this characteristic with Bonnes-Mares,

as one does not routinely think of Clos de la Roche or Clos des Lambrays of showing many of their cards when they are youthful wines, and the same can be said as well for Montrachet amongst the white Burgundy grand crus, which is often very powerful in its youth, but takes many years in the bottle to start to show its true pedigree and the reason it was ranked so far above every other white wine vineyard in the region two or three hundred years ago. But, there is no denying that the vast majority of red wine grand crus are considerably more revealing of their ultimate shape and purpose than Bonnes-Mares when they are young.

Indeed, given Bonnes-Mares' broad shoulders and considerable structure in its youth, some commentators have gone as far to claim that it has much more in common with such Morey St. Denis grand crus as Clos de Tart (which its northern limits abut) and Clos de la Roche than it does with the wines of Chambolle-Musigny. While one might be able to find a few similarities between these vineyards and Bonnes-Mares in younger examples, it seems to me that a Bonnes-Mares at its peak of maturity certainly displays plenty of Chambolle-Musigny character and does not really have a lot in common with its grand cru neighbors to the north in Morey St. Denis. Clos des Lambrays is much more black fruity at maturity, Clos de la Roche more wildly exotic and gamey and Clos de Tart not as deep or complex. The youthful austerity of a top Bonnes-Mares will usually take a minimum of twenty years to blossom and reveal its fruit tones redolent of red and black cherries, plums, strong autumnal notes of forest floor, game tones most closely associated with venison or gamebirds, black or summer truffles, plenty of smokiness and Musigny-like notes of mustard seed, coffee and chocolate. In a top vintage, a Bonnes-Mares can easily last fifty or sixty years, and I have had a few examples from the vintages of the 1940s and 1930s that continue to drink beautifully. In fact, I cannot think of any well-stored bottle of older Bonnes-Mares from a good vintage and a reliable producer that I have had which I would describe as completely over the hill.

But, the key ingredient in appreciating Bonnes-Mares is time, as there are not a whole lot of grand cru red Burgundies that are so shy to show their ultimate shape and style as Bonnes-Mares when the wine is still youthful or adolescent. However, in contrast to a wine such as Richebourg, with which we started our comparison and contrast of Bonnes-Mares at the beginning of the article, an awful lot of the ultimate complexity and charm of the wine can be seen, and often enjoyed, within eight to ten years of the vintage. Richebourg will keep cruising along in the bottle for as long as Bonnes-Mares, but unlike the latter wine, Richebourg in my experience tends to show almost all of its development fairly early and does not continue to improve and gain dramatically in complexity and nuance after ten or fifteen years of bottle age, or at an age where Bonnes-Mares is just beginning to stretch its wings and prepare for a long and magical flight. The few greatest old examples of Richebourg that I have had the pleasure to taste have been some of the very old vintages from the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti that were produced from the section of the vineyard that was not replanted in the wake of phylloxera, but which were retained on their original *franc de pied* rootstocks for as long as possible, and these were the most complex examples of venerable Richebourg that I have ever had the pleasure to taste, so perhaps something important was lost with the grafting over to American rootstocks here. But, I have had far more examples of forty or fifty year-old Richebourg that were a bit lumbering, plump and easy-going, with lots of plummy fruit, chocolate, game and autumnal notes, often with some maltiness, but not wines one would call profoundly complex or refined,

and perhaps this is just a *terroir* that produces wines best savored in their undeniably voluptuous first couple of decades in bottle.

On the other hand, old Bonnes-Mares from a top producer is something that is really very special in my experience, with magical complexity unleashed with all of its Chambolle (and/or Morey) pedigree showing, with a myriad of red and black fruit tones, great spice and herb nuances, a very complex base of soil and all the other aromatic and flavor attributes listed above. One element that I seem to find quite frequently with fully mature examples of Bonnes-Mares is an aromatic signature of heather that is quite consistent and is often a good way to spot this *terroir* in blind tastings of older wines. And on the palate, the wine shows breed and elegance with sufficient bottle age, in fact, more than one could ever imagine possible from experiences solely based on tasting young examples of this very sturdy wine. It takes longer to get to its apogee than most grand crus, but so does Musigny for that matter, despite the fact that a lot more Musigny is drunk way too young than Bonnes-Mares, due to the former's far more detailed and nuanced adolescent period. But, Chambolle-Musigny sits on a profound bed of hard limestone under its surface, and this gives the wines great bones for long-term aging, with perhaps only Musigny, Chambertin (and Clos de Bèze), La Tâche and Romanée-Conti capable of matching Bonnes-Mares amongst all of the Côte de Nuits grand crus for longevity coupled to continued development and improvement over a very long time in the bottle.

Of late, it has been very fashionable to rank the top premier cru vineyard of Chambolle, les Amoureuses, as highly or even higher than Bonnes-Mares, and it is not uncommon in the marketplace today to see les Amoureuses priced higher than the Bonnes-Mares from the same top producer! While I truly love a great bottle of les Amoureuses as much as the next person, I cannot agree with those who would rank these two vineyards as comparable in quality. Certainly, les Amoureuses is the more beautifully expressive (and quintessentially Chambolle) wine over the first twenty-five years of its existence, but it tends to start to lose steam just as Bonnes-Mares is starting to come into its own and is eclipsed in potential longevity (and the attendant development of greater layers of perfumed complexity) by Bonnes-Mares by many decades and in the long run, it simply is not quite as stunning a wine if one can stay the course with a Bonnes-Mares to peak maturity. It is my impression that much of les Amoureuses ascendancy in recent times has to do with our modern penchant for immediate gratification, for les Amoureuses can be an absolute joy to drink in its youth or adolescence, whereas Bonnes-Mares generally only engenders a feeling of "having wasted the bottle" when it is opened too many years before its prime. However, such comparisons of one great grand cru or top premier cru to another really miss the point when it comes to Burgundy, where the Cistercians and their successors laid out the keys for us to savor and appreciate the varied and independent voices of all the different *lieux à dits* to be found in the Côte d'Or. As one of the great contemporary personalities of Burgundy was recently quoted as saying, when a visitor proclaimed that he only drank grand crus and the occasional, very top premier cru: "how very sad for you." For, it is in the spirit of exploration that we should seek to unlock the secrets of Burgundy's incomparably rich and varied mosaic of *terroir*, and in the symphony that is a life spent savoring mature and maturing Burgundy in the glass, one of the most beautiful voices most assuredly belongs to Bonnes-Mares.



2009 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Bart

The 2009 Bonnes-Mares from Martin Bart is superb, as it soars from the glass in an excellent aromatic mélange of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of gamebird, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, a beautifully complex base of soil, a touch of citrus peel and a very stylish framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a rock solid core of pure fruit, lovely soil inflection, seamless tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. 2016-2040+. **93+**.

2009 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier

If one were to ask Monsieur Mugnier which recent vintage he felt was the weakest in the Côte de Nuits, I have little doubt that he would choose 2009, which stylistically, is pretty far removed from what he values most in red Burgundy. His 2009 Bonnes-Mares is a good, solid example of the vintage, but fairly roasted in character already and showing some 1990-like personality traits in its bouquet of red and black cherries, venison, complex soil tones, chocolate, herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a good core, ripe tannins and a long, fairly complex finish. This is not bad by any stretch of the imagination, but it is also not one of the top vintages *chez* Mugnier in the last decade. 2018-2050. **92**.

2009 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

Christophe Roumier produced some of my absolute favorite wines in this ripe and buxom vintage, and where many 2009s have shown more overtly roasted qualities on both the nose and

palate with a few years of bottle age, this has not been the case with the 2009 Roumier Bonnes-Mares, which is absolutely stellar. The bouquet soars from the glass in a very uncharacteristically expressive (for young Bonnes-Mares!) blend of red and black cherries, cocoa, venison, a beautifully complex base of soil, blood orange and a floral topnote redolent of peonies. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and sappy at the core, with ripe tannins, lovely focus and grip and a very, very long, opulent and promising finish. This may one day close down a bit, but at the present time, it remains wide open and is really a delicious young bottle of Burgundy. 2022-2075. **96.**

2008 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Arlaud

The higher percentage of new wood used by Monsieur Arlaud for this bottling marks his Bonnes-Mares a bit more than is the case with the Clos St. Denis in '08 (which was tasted alongside of it). The bouquet is still quite good, as it delivers scents of red and black cherries, coffee, venison, fresh herbs, soil and plenty of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and just a touch dry today from its hefty percentage of new wood, with good mid-palate depth, fine focus and complexity and a bit of uncovered wood tannins on the backend that will need to be absorbed before this wine really starts to drink well. There is clearly plenty of stuffing to absorb the wood, but this wine would have been decidedly better with a lower percentage of new oak. 2016-2040? **90+.**

2008 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Robert Groffier

The 2008 Groffier Bonnes-Mares was obviously raised in more new wood than the domaine's premier crus (I did not ask, as I was getting a bit depressed by the showings of these wines by this point and the young lady pouring them for her family was really very nice), and it has not yet absorbed all of its new oak. The bouquet offers up scents of cherries, plums, venison, coffee, herb tones and plenty of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and currently rather lumpy and lacking in distinction, with solid mid-palate depth and a bit of uncovered oak tannins that will need to resolve before this wine will offer up significant pleasure. Eventually this will happen, but this seems highly unlikely to ever deliver a serious interpretation of this magical *terroir*. 2016-2035. **87+.**

2008 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier

I loved the 2008 Domaine Mugnier Bonnes-Mares out of barrel and nothing about this wine post-bottling dissuades me from believing that this is one of the finest vintages of Mugnier Bonnes-Mares ever produced. The superb and very red fruity nose offers up a sappy mélange of cherries, strawberries, blood orange, vinesmoke, gamebirds, raw cocoa, lovely soil tones and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, long and structured, with great intensity of flavor, ripe tannins, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the peacock's tail of a finish. Great juice. 2018-2055+. **94.**

2008 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

In 2008 the Bonnes-Mares was absolutely singing at the time of my visit in December and seemed even more profound than it did a year ago out of barrel. This is unequivocally a great wine in the making, as the intensity and concentration of Bonnes-Mares dovetails seamlessly with the inherent elegance of the vintage to produce a magical bottle of wine. The celestial nose offers up a brilliant mélange of black cherries, plums, blood orange, woodsmoke, a glorious base of complex soil tones, fresh herbs and a pungent topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with ripe tannins, laser-like focus, bright acids and a monumental finish of amazing elegance and poise. Stunning juice. 2022-2075+. **97.**

2007 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Dujac

The 2007 Domaine Dujac Bonnes-Mares is one of the youngest examples of the vintage that I have tasted from the Seysses family, and this wine is still quite youthful and in its adolescence today. The bouquet is very deep, very pure and very primary, delivering scents of plums, black cherries, cocoa, still a bit of its youthful stemminess, lovely, but undeveloped notes of soil and a fair bit of youthful new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance, still a very hunkered down personality and a fair bit of oak influence on the backend that comes across as graphite, as it has not yet been fully integrated into the body of the wine. This will be excellent, but it is hard to get a real read on its ultimate shape right now, as this is still getting comfortable in its own skin and many years away from blossoming. Given how stellar the rest of the Dujac range is in this vintage, it is hard not to imagine that this wine will be stunning with sufficient bottle age, but be patient and leave this puppy alone in a cold corner of the cellar for at least another eight to ten years! 2022-2060. **93-96?**

2007 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier

Freddy Mugnier's 2007 Bonnes-Mares is a beautiful and very elegant, transparent example of the vintage that is only a few years away from reaching its plateau of maturity, where I have little doubt it will delight for a couple of decades. The pure and very soil specific nose offers up scents of red and black cherries, gamebirds, a bit of nutskin, cocoa, mustard seed, gentle notes of vanillin oak and a very complex and classy base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and intensely flavored, with great transparency, a fine core of gently sappy fruit, moderate tannins and a very long, tangy and refined finish. A beautifully suave and feminine example of Bonnes-Mares that is so well-balanced that it will age for decades, but should start to drink with unabashed enthusiasm in a few more years. A lovely wine. 2017-2045+. **93+**.

2007 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

The 2007 Roumier Bonnes-Mares is a stunning wine in the making, but it too is quite young and needs some time alone in the cellar before it starts to stir. The deep, pure and very promising nose wafts from the glass in a sappy blend of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of heather, cocoa, gamebirds, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and primary, with a sappy core, excellent focus and balance, ripe, chewy tannins and lovely bounce on the long and youthful finish. A stellar wine in the making. 2022-2075. **96.**

2003 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Louis Jadot

The 2003 Jadot reds that I have tasted in the last few years have been amongst the best examples of the vintage that I have had the pleasure to taste, and this 2003 Bonnes-Mares was no exception. The bouquet is deep and complex, as it offers up scents of baked red and black cherries, hickory smoke, roasted venison, incipient notes of *sous bois* and just a touch of fig. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and shows very good acidity for the vintage, with good mid-palate depth, plenty of firm tannin and impressive length and grip on the quite fresh finish (particularly for an '03 Burgundy). This should age very well. 2009-2040? **89+**.



A view of Bonnes-Mares from the air, with the village of Chambolle in the upper left hand corner.

2000 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The Drouhin family's Bonnes-Mares is one of the very finest examples of this great grand cru produced in all of Burgundy, but as it is made in small quantities, it seems to always float a bit below the radar. The 2000 vintage has produced another absolutely stellar bottle, as the wine delivers a deep, intense and utterly classic blend of cherries, pomegranate, coffee, a bit of venison, a superbly complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly youthful in profile for a 2000, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent focus and balance, suave tannins and a long, vibrant and still fairly primary finish. I would still give this excellent wine a few more years in the cellar to really come into its own. 2017-2040. **93+**.

2000 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Dujac

I had a lovely half bottle of this wine in Burgundy last March, and this past November's tasting featured a full bottle that was just stunning. This is one Dujac 2000 that went through a rather fruit-driven stage (the Gruenchers was another, which alas, I have not been back to in three or four years) right out of the blocks that was lovely, but in a slightly one-dimensional manner that hid much of the inherent breed and complexity of each *terroir*. I was very happy to see the soil now beginning to take center stage in these two examples of the Bonnes-Mares, as the wine offers up a stunning bouquet of red cherries, orange rind, gamebirds, woodsmoke, cloves, mustardy herb tones, earth and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and focused, with great mid-palate depth, a stunning base of minerality, and superb length and grip on the aristocratic and profound finish. One of the wines of the vintage without a doubt. 2008-2030. **95**.

2000 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

I have always admired the 2000 Roumier Bonnes-Mares, and at age eight it is nicely rounding into form. The bouquet is deep, complex and pure, as it offers up emerging notes of red and black cherries, espresso, game, a great base of soil and classic Bonnes-Mares signature notes of heather. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and brilliantly focused, with great purity and a still quite primary personality, with modest tannins, sound acids and stunning length and grip on the complex and refined finish. A superb wine that could do with just a couple more years to fully blossom. 2010-2030. **93+**.

1998 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Bart

The 1998 Bonnes-Mares from Domaine Bart is a really outstanding bottle of this great *terroir*, offering up a complex and blossoming nose of backed black cherries and plums, roasted meats, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke and a topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beginning to turn nicely autumnal, with a fine core, melting tannins and very fine length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This is a lovely wine that is just starting to drink well today, but has decades of life still ahead of it. Its balance is far more suave than is typical of so many 1998s at this point in time and augurs extremely well for its future evolution. Fine juice. 2013-2035+. **92+**.

1996 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Bart

The 1996 Bonnes-Mares from Martin Bart is just beginning to drink at its apogee and offers up beautiful complexity on both the nose and palate. The utterly refined and classic bouquet delivers scents of black cherries, a touch of blood orange, game, woodsmoke, incipient notes of *sous bois*, a touch of dark chocolate, fresh herbs and a nice base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with suave, modest tannins, bright and very well-integrated acids, outstanding complexity and simply superb length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. Domaine Bart's '96 Bonnes-Mares is an absolutely classic example of this great *terroir*. 2011-2040+. **94**.

1996 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Drouhin-Laroze

For drinking up over the relative near-term, the very pretty Drouhin-Laroze is a very fine bottle, but this wine shows a lot of maturity to its fruit component and may not be able to maintain its high level for more than a handful of years. The nose is deep and complex, as it offers up a mélange of black cherries, coffee, *sous bois*, vinesmoke, venison and a fair bit of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, open and impressively complex, with a good core, modest tannins, tangy acids and very good length and grip on the finish. The wine became ever more tertiary in its aromatics and flavors as it sat in the glass, which makes me believe it should be drunk up over the relative near-term. 2011-2020+? **90**.

1996 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Dujac

The 1996 Dujac Bonnes-Mares is the most stunning of the '96 Dujac bottlings that I tasted in preparation for this article- which is pretty high praise, given the absolutely stellar quality of the Dujac portfolio across the board in this vintage! The brilliant nose soars from the glass in a beautiful and magically complex mélange of red and black cherries, mustard seed, venison, coffee, woodsmoke, orange peel, exceptional soil tones, cinnamon and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and laser-like in its focus, with stunning complexity, a great core of pure fruit, seamless balance and stunning length and grip on the moderately tannic and tangy

finish. If all 1996 red Burgundies were balanced like the Dujac Bonnes-Mares, this would be a vintage of epic proportions! 2016-2050+. **96.**

1996 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Louis Jadot

The 1996 Louis Jadot Bonnes-Mares is a classic example of the vintage. The wine offers up a deep, complex and still quite youthful aromatic mélange of black cherries, dark berries, espresso, black truffles, woodsmoke, heather, a touch of chocolate and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and perfectly balanced, with a great core of fruit, superb length and grip, moderate tannins and a tangy acids adding purity and transparency on the great finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Bonnes-Mares in the making, I would keep this wine tucked away in the cellar for at least another five years. 2016-2075. **93+.**

1995 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine de Comte de Vogüé

I was highly critical of the 1995 vintage at Domaine de Comte de Vogüé when the wines were young, but the wines have aged far better than I ever imagined possible out of the blocks and I seriously underestimated these wines. The 1995 Bonnes-Mares offers up a lovely, musky bouquet of red and black cherries, vinesmoke, a complex base of soil tones, mustard seed, gamebirds and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with superb complexity, a lovely core of fruit, melting tannin and lovely length and grip on the poised and classy finish. A really lovely 1995 red Burgundy! 2015-2050. **94.**

1993 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Louis Jadot

I had tasted the '93 Jadot Bonnes-Mares a few years ago and found it rather lacking in freshness to the point of a flaw, but either the wine is rallying nicely with a bit more bottle age, or (more likely) the last example I tasted was not pristine, as this bottle showed decidedly more interesting. The nose is now beginning to blossom into its tertiary stage of aromatics, as it offers up an autumnal mélange of underbrush, game, woodsmoke, dark berries and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full-bodied, with good mid-palate depth, moderate acidity and tannins, and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is very much cut in the Jadot house style, which trades more on soil flavors and less on fresh fruit tones, but it is quite a successful example of its genre. I would give it just a couple more years to fully blossom, and then drink it over the next twenty years, though it may prove to be much longer-lived than that. I vastly underrated it the last time I had it. 2010-2030+. **90.**

1990 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

Christophe Roumier's Bonnes-Mares is a very good example of the vintage, as it offers up a deep and still quite youthful nose of black cherries, plums, chocolate, venison, mustard seed, smoke, a touch of beetroot and a really very good base of autumnal soil tones (particularly in the context of the vintage). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a thick core of fruit, really very good *terroir*, ripe, moderate tannins and a very long, powerful and promising finish. This wine is still fairly primary in personality and I would opt for giving it further bottle age, but it is one of my favorite 1990 red Burgundies that have crossed my path in the last few years. 2018-2050+. **94.**



1989 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

The 1989 vintage is not one that Christophe Roumier looks back on fondly, but his Bonnes-Mares is excellent and continues to cruise along beautifully at age twenty-five. This was the very first vintage where Christophe did away with multiple bottlings of Bonnes-Mares and only produced a single cuvée, which he has done in each subsequent vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mature and vibrant mix of black cherries, plums, woodsmoke, game, *sous bois*, mustard seed and a dollop of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and still nicely plush at the core, with melted tannins, sound acids, fine focus and grip and a long, velvety and quite classy finish. Good juice at its apogee, but with plenty of life still in it. 2014-2040. **93.**

1988 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Dujac

The 1988 Dujac Bonnes-Mares is a quintessential example of the vintage, and while the wine is still buttoned up quite a bit behind its significant wall of acidity, the depth and complexity that lies behind the acids are readily apparent. The nose is deep, complex and red fruity, offering up notes of raspberries, cherries, orange zest, cinnamon, *sous bois*, mustard seed, striking minerality and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with excellent intensity of flavor, solid depth at the core, beautiful transparency, and a very long, complex and snappy finish. The tannins here are quite moderate, but the wine still demands a bit of patience to allow the acids to fully peel back. 2010-2040. **94+.**

1988 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Louis Jadot

The 1988 Louis Jadot Bonnes-Mares is still a tad on the young side and could do with just a couple more years of bottle age before having at it in earnest. The bouquet is deep and black fruity, as it offers up scents of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, espresso, a lovely base of soil, a touch of venison, mustard seed and blossoming notes of *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and initially quite tight when first poured, with good mid-palate depth, modest tannins, tangy acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and soil-driven

finish. A very good example of the vintage that may move up a couple more points as it gets older. 2009-2030. **89+**.

1988 Bonnes-Mares “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Georges Roumier

I have had quite a few bottles of the 1988 Bonnes-Mares Vieilles Vignes from Christophe Roumier over the years, as this is a very special wine and the only vintage in which he ever bottled a special cuvée from his oldest parcel of vines in the vineyard. Incidentally, this was all from *Terres Blanches*. This most recent bottle was sourced by a friend for us to share during a November Burgundy trip and it is every bit as magnificent today as it has ever been, with all of the promise this wine has shown from early on in its evolution now coming home. The stunning nose is now starting to show elements of maturity and offers up a deep and utterly compelling blend of red and black cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, a nice touch of gamebird, chalky soil tones, the first vestiges of its autumnal elements to come, roses and a very discreet touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows of a very deep and sappy core, still with a bit of well-integrated tannins, impeccable balance, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and very complex finish. This is one of the great wines Christophe Roumier has made in his long and illustrious career and it is always a great pleasure to have a chance to drink this wine. It should continue to cruise along at this rarefied level of quality for decades to come. 2011-2050. **96**.

1985 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Louis Jadot

I am not sure if this bottle was slightly off or if the wine is still in a transition phase and will brighten up a bit on the palate with further bottle age. Certainly the nose was spot on, as it offers up a complex and vibrant blend of red and black cherries, sweet plums, a touch of cocoa, venison, *sous bois*, smoke and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, modest tannins and lovely complexity on the slightly flat, but long finish. I might anticipate a bit more grip and vibrancy on the backend, particularly after such a fine aromatic display, so it is possible that this bottle was not totally pristine. 2010-2035? **90+?**

1980 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

I have had the pleasure to drink the 1980 Roumier Bonnes-Mares with some frequency in the past, as the wine was often popping up in the 1990s on cellar lists and I never hesitated to buy it when it was available at the right price. As this bottle was sourced from Burgundy, I have to assume that it was the *Terres Blanches* bottling, and it was still quite lovely, though now starting to move along towards the far side of its plateau and not quite as vigorous as it was back in the 1990s and early 2000s. The bouquet is still a lovely and very pure mélange of dried cherries, strawberries, gamebirds, *sous bois*, mustard seed, a touch of nutskin and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with melted tannins, tangy acids and lovely length and grip on the fully mature and elegant finish. I suspect that the acids are going to start to peel away from the structure of this wine in the coming decade, so it would not be a crime to start to consider drinking it up over the coming years. 2012-2030. **91**.

1978 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Joseph Drouhin

I had not seen a bottle of the '78 Drouhin Bonnes-Mares since 2006, so I was delighted to have a chance to taste a bottle during a recent trip to Burgundy. This is an utterly classic example of this great vintage, with the wine soaring from the glass in a brilliant and still quite youthful

mélange of cherries, plums, heather, venison, a touch of mustard seed, a beautifully complex base of soil, coffee and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with modest tannins, outstanding acids, great focus and grip and a very, very long, peacock's tail of a finish. Maison Drouhin does not make a lot of Bonnes-Mares, so the wine is not as well-known as some of their other top grand cru cuvées, but this is as fine an example of this great *terroir* as anyone could ever hope to find. 2010-2050. **95.**

1972 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Joseph Drouhin

This was my last bottle of '72 Drouhin Bonnes-Mares out of my cellar, and it was every bit as lovely as the last few I had tasted over the eight or ten years which I owned this wine. The deep and beautifully refined nose seemed a touch higher-toned than the last couple of bottles, offering up a red fruity bouquet of cherries, red berries, citrus zest, heather, venison, mustard seed, *sous bois*, coffee and a nice touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very intensely flavored, with great focus and transparency, little remaining tannin and superb length and grip on the beautifully balanced and complex finish. This is a really superb example of the vintage, and for those that may still have a few bottles, it has plenty of life ahead of it. 2009-2025+. **93+.**

1971 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Joseph Drouhin

This particular bottle of '71 Drouhin Bonnes-Mares was a bit volatile, with the VA elevating the aromatics on the nose quite a bit, but also showing up in a more derogatory way on the backend of the palate. The truly outstanding bouquet jumps from the glass in a blaze of cherries, heather, coffee, venison, sweet nutty tones, forest floor and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure and complex on the attack, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a very long, meltingly tannic and fairly volatile finish. I am sure that pristine bottles of this wine are sublime, but it really depended on one's tolerance for VA on just how much pleasure could be derived from this particular bottle. That said, I have had absolutely pristine bottles of this a few years back that fully merited a score at the top of this range. 2013-2035+. **87-94.**

1971 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Camille Giroud

The 1971 Bonnes-Mares from Camille Giroud is a very good bottle that continues to drink at its apogee. The very classy nose wafts from the glass in a blend of cassis, black cherries, forest floor, new leather, oak leaves, game and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, fine focus, melted tannins and lovely length and grip on the finish. There is not quite the complexity on the palate here to make this a first division Bonnes-Mares, but this is a very good bottle that still has a couple of decades of fine drinking ahead of it. 2011-2030. **90.**

1962 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Clair-Daü (magnum)

This magnum of '62 Bonnes-Mares from Clair-Daü was quite high-toned on both the nose and palate and seemed to indicate that drinking up would not be a bad idea. The deep and very stylish nose offers up scents of dried berries, cherries, coffee, woodsmoke, heather, forest floor and a bit of roasted venison. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and intensely flavored, with fairly modest mid-palate density, but lovely complexity and grip. The finish is long and classy, with fine balance, but it seems to be thinning now just a bit on the backend and I would be strongly inclined to drink this wine up in the next several years. It is still a very lovely glass of wine, but, though its demise is not imminent, its days are numbered. 2008-2020? **89.**

1957 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier (served from magnum)

The 1957 Roumier Bonnes-Mares out of magnum is still drinking beautifully, as it wafts from the glass in a stunningly pure and complex constellation of cherries, dried plums, heather, gentle notes of bonfire, a beautifully refined base of autumnal soil tones, coffee and mustard seed. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and now quite tertiary in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, still a touch of backend tannin, fine focus and grip and a very long, tangy and well-balanced finish. This still has plenty of life in it, but is at its apogee and drinking with great refinement and breed. 2012-2035. **94.**

1955 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Bouchard-Âiné

I do not have a lot of experience with the older wines from Bouchard-Âiné, but this '55 Bonnes-Mares was not bad in a slightly old-fashioned style that was certainly generous in its chapitalization. Fifty-five years on, this has translated into a slightly malty wine that offers up scents of black cherries, forest floor, malty tones, roasted game and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit four-square, with a good core, no rough edges and sneaky length on the velvety finish. This is more “good, solid old Burgundy” that is slightly generic in nature, rather than a top example of the *terroir* of Bonnes-Mares. 2009-2020. **87.**

1937 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 1937 Bonnes-Mares from Maison Drouhin is still a beautiful old bottle of Chambolle-Musigny, but, not surprisingly, it is getting towards the far end of its plateau and only held up well for about thirty minutes after opening, after which it gently faded into that long goodnight. However, during its half hour of vigor, the wine was really lovely, wafting from the glass in an autumnal blend of desiccated cherries, orange zest, heather, *sous bois*, gamebird, a touch of oak leaves and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and intensely flavored, with sound acids and grip, fine focus and lovely length and grip on the velvety finish. Thirty minutes of great pleasure, followed by a slow and gentle decline, this wine should probably be drunk up in the next decade or so, but who knows, there may be even more sturdy bottles out there still! 2012-2025. **92.**

1923 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine de Comte de Vogüé

The 1923 Bonnes-Mares from Comte de Vogüé is a gorgeous old red Burgundy that remains fully in its apogee and is drinking with lovely vitality and perfumed refinement. The gorgeous bouquet wafts from the glass in a tertiary blend of dried red fruit, gamebirds, woodsmoke, heather, forest floor, coffee and mustard seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still marvelously vigorous for its age, with a fine core, glorious transparency, just a whisper of remaining tannin and lovely grip and bounce on the very long and complex finish. Many wines at this age start to lose some of their signature of *terroir*, but this is not the case with the 1923 Comte de Vogüé, as this is a stunning old bottle of Bonnes-Mares! 2009-2025+. **94.**

Older Notes

The last update I did on my first article on the vineyard of Bonnes-Mares was written and appeared in another venue back in 2003, and I include here a parcel of notes that hail from that piece, simply as a way of pointing out how well the wines from this vineyard age over the very long haul, and how important it is to have patience if one wishes to unlock the true secrets to be found here. As pristinely stored bottles of great old Burgundy have gotten harder to find in the

last decade, the odds of my re-crossing paths with most of these venerable bottles of magnificent Bonnes-Mares are quite slim these days, so it strikes me as at least useful to include them here for reference. Given Bonnes-Mares' penchant for longevity, many of these wines, if one stumbles upon a bottle from a good cellar, are very, very likely still to be capable of delivering great pleasure.

1992 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

It had been five to seven years since I last saw a bottle of the 1992 Roumier Bonnes-Mares, and the lovely showing of this wine really made me regret drinking my own bottles of '92 Roumiers early on in their evolutions. The wines early one were deep and complex, but marked by a bit of greenness that translated into herbal aspects on both the nose and palate. Today, ninety percent of that component is gone in the '92 Bonnes-Mares, and result is a lovely bottle. The bouquet offers up notes of heather, red cherries, quince, herb tones, venison, sous bois, coffee and earth. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and just a touch four-square for Bonnes-Mares, but with good depth in the mid-palate, solid acids, and impressive length and grip on the finish. A lovely drink that should hold well for another five to ten years, but is drinking at its apogee today. 2005-2015? **90.**

1990 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Louis Jadot (375 ml.)

The '90 Jadot Bonnes-Mares is one of the best examples of the vintage that I have tasted in the last several years, as the wine has retained much of the freshness and purity that made this vintage so exciting in its youth. The bouquet is deep and strikingly vibrant, as it offers up notes of candied black cherries, plums, chocolate, a touch of venison, forest floor, woodsmoke and herb tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and complex, with excellent focus and balance, modest and well-integrated tannins, and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. This is ready to drink in half bottle (though it could probably use a few more years in regular-sized format), and is a very, very impressive 1990. There is not a bit of the roasty pruniness that defines the vast majority of wines from this vintage these days. 2006-2025+. **94.**

1988 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine de Comte de Vogüé

The 1988 Bonnes-Mares from Comte de Vogüé falls just short of being truly outstanding, as its excellent depth and complexity is betrayed a bit on the finish, where the wine's new oak now sticks out and adds a bitter element of dry wood tannin to what otherwise would have been a terrific example of the vintage. The bouquet is deep and quite lovely, offering up notes of sweet cherry fruit, plums, chocolate, venison, classic Bonnes-Mares notes of heather, a rather modest bit of soil, and a generous coating of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and delivers lovely sweetness on the attack, with good depth at the core, but a distinct note of bitter tannins knocking down the score considerably on the finish. With less or better-integrated new oak, this would have been a superb bottle of wine, but even with its slightly over the top oak, it is still quite good. There certainly seems sufficient core materials to carry the oak, but I would still opt for drinking this over the next decade or so, as eventually the fruit will begin to lose a bit of intensity, and wood component will eventually get the upper hand. But that is still quite some years away. I would opt for drinking this with a grilled steak or the like, where the food should ameliorate much of the bitterness of the finish. 2006-2015+? **89.**

1985 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Dujac

Jacques Seysses' wonderful 1985s perfectly captured the abundant charms of the vintage, while still retaining the structure and balance that have allowed the wines to age gracefully. His 1985 Bonnes-Mares is lovely, with a complex, red fruity bouquet of cherry, quince, strawberry, venison, coffee, herbs and cinnamon wood wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and tangy, with lovely focus, good acids, and a long, zesty finish. This is a quintessential 1985, with plenty of depth, but no longer retaining any reserves of fruit for further development. I would opt for drinking this wine over the next several years, as it is fully mature and unlikely to improve beyond this lovely point in its evolution. 1998-2006. **92.**

1980 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Dujac

The 1980 Dujac Bonnes-Mares is a fascinating wine, in that it is extremely advanced and autumnal aromatically, and yet the wine possesses copious amounts of fruit and great youthful vigor and grip on the palate. The bouquet is totally *à point*, offering up scents of underbrush, coffee, venison, delicate notes of strawberry and red plum, a hint of cinnamon, porcini and cedary wood. However, on the palate this full-bodied wine is much more fruit-driven than the nose would indicate, with fine depth of red fruit on the attack, a solid core, and great grip and focus on the long, meltingly tannic finish. There are still excellent acids here, indicating that the wine should continue cruising along nicely for a number of years still. 2001-2010+. **90.**



1979 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Dujac

The 1979 Dujac Bonnes-Mares is still drinking beautifully, and though signs are now abundant that it is nearing the end of its plateau and will begin setting soon, it has outlasted the vast, vast majority of the 1979s. The nose is still marvelous, offering up a classy red fruity mélange of cherries, strawberries, woodsmoke, duck, *sous bois*, minerals, mustard seed and a pronounced topnote of cinnamon. On the palate the wine is medium-full and just beginning to show signs of volatility, with solid depth at the core, good focus, and a lovely, long and complex finish. The acids will continue to peel away from the structure of the wine, and this will begin to slide over the near-term, so I would drink it up with pleasure now in normal sized formats. A truly outstanding example of the vintage at this late date. I only mark it down a bit for its beginning to slide on the palate, as the bouquet is still 93+ range. 2005-2007. **89.**

1972 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Dujac

The '72 Bonnes-Mares has obviously been fully mature for years, but it continues to drink magically. It is the epitome of mature, ethereal and red fruity Burgundy that has retained plenty of depth and intensity, and while only medium-bodied, is a quintessential Chambolle. The bouquet offers up notes of wild strawberries, red cherries, a bit of quince, mustard seed, minerals, a bit of cinnamon, rose petals, *sous bois* and cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-weight, but deep and intensely-flavored, with a fine core of red berries, great transparency, and lovely length and complexity on the tangy finish. I would guess this wine will continue to drink beautifully for another eight to ten years, but it is in full bloom right now. 2002-2010+. **94.**

1972 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

I have been fortunate enough to have the '72 Bonnes-Mares from Roumier on more than a dozen occasions (a cellar unearthed four years ago contained three cases, that were split up amongst friends), and I have always enjoyed the wine very much. Interestingly, on most occasions, I have found the wine still a bit closed, but without the reassuringly thick mid-palate of fruit reserves to unequivocally guarantee that waiting will be rewarded with a better bottle than what was sitting in the glass at the time. However, this particular bottle was the finest I have ever tasted, with the wine in full majestic strut. The very sweet nose explodes from the glass with scents of kirsch-like black cherries, venison, *sous bois*, mustard seed, coffee, woodsmoke, grilled nuts, herbs, earth and a hint of cedary wood. Medium-full, deep and complex on the palate, with layers of ripe fruit, stunning delineation, and a long, tangy finish. A great wine at its apogee, but with years of life ahead of it. 1998-2008. **94+.**

1969 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The '69 Drouhin Bonnes-Mares is stellar, offering up a classic nose of red cherries, plums, woodsmoke, gamebirds, autumnal notes, mustard, earth and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and drinking beautifully, with lovely focus and soil inflection, fading tannins, and wonderful length on the velvety finish. This is quite pure for a '69, with none of the slightly prune-y or roasted tones that can be found in some wines from this vintage, with good *gras* for a thirty-two year-old wine, and a lovely persistence on the finish. It is quite similarly cut to a bottle of the 1971 that I tasted late last year, with perhaps just a bit more mid-palate depth still remaining. Lovely, lovely juice. 2001-2012. **93.**

1966 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine de Comte de Vogüé

I have always had a weak spot for the 1966 red Burgundy vintage, but had never crossed paths with the De Vogüé Bonnes-Mares until this lovely bottle. Judging from this bottle, I would suspect that all of De Vogüé's holdings in Bonnes-Mares are in *terres blanches*, as this wine is very elegant and red fruity in a character that bespeaks of limestone soils. The bouquet is deep, perfumed and absolutely lovely, offering up scents of red cherries, strawberries, coffee, *sous bois*, faint game notes, minerals and a distinct topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and extremely elegant, with lovely transparency, great intensity of flavor, perfect balance, and a very complex and extremely long finish. This is what great Burgundy is all about. 2001-2015. **95.**

1966 Bonnes-Mares “Ancienne Domaine Belorgey”- Domaine Clair-Daü

The well-regarded Domaine Belorgey's parcel of Bonnes-Mares was purchased in the 1950s by Domaine Georges Roumier and Domaine Clair-Daü, though this is the first time that I have ever seen a label that mentioned the former Belorgey estate on the label. The wine is quite elegant and lovely, though it is now beginning to slide down the far side of its plateau. The bouquet offers up scents of red cherries and strawberries, coffee, herb tones, lovely minerality, a hint of game and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is medium-full, round and silky, with still decent structure, but with gentle acids and faded tannins, indicating that it is time to drink this wine up in regular sized format. I have had more vigorous and meaty examples of Clair-Daü Bonnes-Mares from the same era, which leads me to wonder whether or not this was a separate bottling of the old Belorgey plot. In any event, this is a very lovely and elegant bottle of Bonnes-Mares for near-term drinking. 2002-2006. **89.**

1966 Bonnes-Mares- Maison Faiveley

I am not certain, but my gut instincts are that the source for Maison Faiveley of Bonnes-Mares back in this era would have been the Mugnier family, as this predates the start of domaine bottling at the Château de Chambolle-Musigny, and Maison Faiveley was already farming the Clos de la Maréchale owned by the Mugniers at the time. The 1966 Bonnes-Mares from Faiveley is a lovely bottle of wine, but it does not possess anywhere near the same candied red fruity freshness of the '66 Comtes de Vogüé version that was paired up alongside of it. This is certainly a very fine bottle of mature wine, but much more defined by its soil and autumnal elements than it is by its mature fruit tones. The bouquet offers up complex and tertiary aromas of woodsmoke, venison, forest floor, some cassis and black plum fruit, espresso, herb tones and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and resolved, with fine mid-palate depth, excellent structure, and fine length and grip on the complex finish. It is a bigger wine than the '66 De Vogüé, but it would be well-served to have a bit of that wine's gorgeous Chambolle red fruit buried in the core. A fine bottle with plenty of life ahead of it, but not quite up to the best examples of the vineyard. 2002-2015. **91.**

1962 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine de Comte de Vogüé

The decade of the 1960s has to be one of the finest of the twentieth century for Burgundy, as 1962, 1964, 1966 and 1969 all produced superb, long-lived wines. Of all these years, the 1962s remain the best-kept secrets: drinking beautifully, with plenty of depth and life to them still. 1962 was a superb vintage for Comte de Vogüé. I have had the pleasure of drinking both the '62 Bonnes-Mares and '62 Musigny Vieilles Vignes previously, but on that occasion, we also had a pristine, utterly magical bottle of the 1945 De Vogüé Musigny Vieilles Vignes which made it hard to truly concentrate on the 1962s. This particular showing of the 1962 Bonnes-Mares was

stunning, with a great bouquet of cherries, plums, game, smoke, herb tones, soil and a hint of cedary wood wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is utterly refined and resolved, with great focus, plenty of depth and body, layers of complex fruit tones, good structure, and a long, stunning finish. For me this is quintessential Burgundy, with years and years of life ahead of it. Great wine. 1998-2008. **95.**

1961 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

The domaine-bottled version of 1961 Bonnes-Mares from the Roumier family (there is also a Remoissenet-bottled version of this wine that I have tasted in the past and which is not in the same league) is a superb example of the vintage. The bouquet is deep and classic, offering up notes of cherry, quince, coffee, woodsmoke, game, mustard seed, forest floor and cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and intensely-flavored, with good depth at the core, and fine length and tang on the complex finish. Out of the blocks this wine showed just a touch of mid-palate dilution, but blossomed and filled in beautifully after about fifteen minutes of air. A truly fine 1961 with years of life ahead of it. 2001-2013. **93.**

1953 Bonnes-Mares “Terres Rouges”- Domaine Georges Roumier

This is an absolutely great showing for this wine! The bouquet is deep and perfumed, offering up notes of candied red and black cherries, gamebirds, *sous bois*, smoke, fine minerality, heather, mustard seed, roses and a hint of spicy wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and elegant, with wonderful transparency, an ethereal lightness of step very reminiscent of the '62 Joseph Drouhin les Amoureuses (that a group of us had the pleasure to share on this same evening), and great length and bounce on the complex and intensely flavored finish. This is a great bottle of wine that still has years of life ahead of it. It is an extremely elegant rendition of *Terres Rouges* and a wine of great breed and complexity. 2003-2020. **96.**

1948 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

I have never had any great '48 Burgundies prior to this wine, but based on this showing, there may be more diamonds out there. This is a classic '40s Burgundy, with great depth of fruit and still plenty of spine. The bouquet is deep and stunning, exploding from the glass with scents of dark berry fruit, venison, mushrooms, *sous bois*, woodsmoke, herb tones, strong, chalky minerality (this is primarily from *Terres Blanches* soils, as the Belorgey parcel from which most of the Roumiers' *Terres Rouges* originates was not purchased until the early 1950s). On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and seamless, with great depth of fruit at the core, a very tertiary flavor spectrum, still a bit of tannin, and amazing length, grip and complexity on the finish. This wine has everything one could ask for, and still has years and years ahead of it. An utterly profound expression of Bonnes-Mares. 2002-2025. **96.**

1945 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

To date, 1945 Comte De Vogüé Musigny Vieilles Vignes has always been my reference point for the greatest of all red Burgundies. Now I think it has met its match. The '45 Roumier Bonnes-Mares is quite differently styled than the De Vogüé, with less of the exotic candied fruit, but with the same bottomless depth of fruit, incomparable complexity, and utterly timeless character on both the nose and palate. The bouquet just churns and churns from the glass, offering up an extremely complex and nuanced nose of dark fruit, venison and gamebirds, woodsmoke, autumnal notes of forest floor in every possible combination, mustard seed, chocolate, intense limestone soil tones, a bit of truffle and a topnote of roses. The complexity and nuance of this nose is virtually indescribable, and the note above really does it absolutely no justice. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, perfectly balanced, with great delineation, still a bit

of well-integrated tannin, and a seamless and virtually never-ending finish. The intensity and waves of flavor that take over from the mid-palate back on this wine are unbelievable, and the wine can still be tasted on the palate fifteen minutes after the last sip has been regretfully swallowed. Honestly, a barrel sample of the 2000 Roumier Bonnes-Mares late the following morning triggered the same flavors of the '45, drunk more than twelve hours previous. This is unequivocally one of the greatest bottles of wine that I have ever had the pleasure to taste, and I have little expectation that I will cross paths with many (if any) mature Burgundies of this stature again. To put this wine in perspective, to my palate it towers over '45 Mouton. 2002-2040. **100.**

1934 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

The 1934 Roumier Bonnes-Mares is a wine of no faults, but it did have the misfortune of following the 1945. This is unquestionably a great, great bottle of wine, but it just does not possess quite the same flavor and aromatic dimension of the 1945. The nose is extremely similar in its nuance (though not anywhere near as bottomless), offering up a deep and complex mélange of red and black cherries, plums, coffee, vinesmoke, game, herb tones, *sous bois* and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and still very powerful, with great focus and structure, a rock solid core of vibrant fruit, and great tertiary complexity on the long and powerful finish. This wine does not quite possess the finesse of the 1948 or the stunning, multi-dimensional expanse of the timeless '45, but this too is an profoundly great Bonnes-Mares. Following such exalted wines, this big wine seemed ever so slightly pinched, and though it has tremendous depth, it was hard for it not to come across as ever so slight in comparison. But this is a wine that I would drink again anytime, anywhere. 2002-2030. **95.**

1928 Bonnes-Mares- Domaine Georges Roumier

The 1928 Bonnes-Mares is a fabulous bottle of wine. Christophe Roumier recorked it in January of 2003, and the wine has recovered beautifully from the recorking by the time we tackled it in November of that year. Seeing as the domaine's *terres rouges* parcel of Bonnes-Mares came from Domaine Belorgey in 1953, one has to assume that this is primarily *terres blanches*. The bouquet is deep, fabulous and very vigorous, offering up notes of dried black cherries and plums, grilled gamebirds, mushrooms, lavender, autumnal notes, loads of Bonnes-Mares soil tones, a bit of seasoned leather, chocolate, spices and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and incredibly complex, with outstanding tertiary development, a sweet core of black fruit, woodsy tones of dried leaves, and great length and grip on the focused and stunningly complex finish. The wine is old, but impressively powerful and vibrant, with excellent focus, fine balance, and enough well-integrated tannin to carry the wine at least another twenty years. This is an amazing wine that held up beautifully over the first forty-five minutes we had it opened, and then began to fade ever so slightly on the palate. I would opt to pour it immediately upon opening, but it clearly will last another twenty-five or more years. A timeless monument. 2003-2030+? **95.**

THE ZINFANDELS OF DAYS GONE BY



Perhaps no other grape in California's wine history has gone through a greater transformation than that of zinfandel, which was once thought to be the only native *Vinifera* grape in the state (though it turns out to have its origins in Croatia) and which was the backbone of so many hearty California red wine bottlings in the earliest days of the wine industry in this state. As much of the first *Vinifera* vineyard planting in the state was carried out by Italian immigrants in the nineteenth century (though interestingly, zinfandel was first planted in California by relocated New Englanders in post-gold rush times, from plant material purchased from east coast nurseries), it is not surprising that zinfandel was one of the grape varieties that they sought out to make their house wines, which were so much a part of the Italian heritage that they brought to California from the old world, as they could use this grape as the backbone for the hearty red wines that they favored and which harkened back to the wines they drank in Italy. As early as 1860, California wine country could boast more than thirty-four thousand acres of zinfandel vineyards, and there was certainly many thousand more acres inter-planted in field blends at this time with other grapes such as carignane and mataro. While many of the earliest planted vineyards of zinfandel in California wine country have been lost to subdivisions, other cash crops or tonier grape varieties over the years, there remains a surprisingly fair number of hectares of old vine zinfandel vineyards still scattered around the state, with many of them now

quite ancient, and there has been a project established under the auspices of the University of California at Davis since the mid-1990s to take cuttings from vines planted prior to 1930, in an effort to save clonal material from these old vines and to cultivate nurseries for future plantings that will maintain the grape's character in the future. Consequently, there should remain very good planting options for vineyard owners down the road for putting in new parcels of zinfandel.

The zinfandel grape was very much part of the mixed agricultural base that was predominant in much of California wine country in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth, before prohibition came along and cast such a long shadow over wine production in the state during its duration. Grape growing was not as lucrative in these early days as it is today, and fruit, nut trees or vegetable farming (not to mention raising livestock) were very much practiced by farmers who owned vines, so most ranches would have a significant percentage of farmland devoted to other important cash crops, and the vineyards on the property were often primarily devoted to the production of house wine for the farmer and his family, or sold in bulk to other immigrants in the area who would make their own wine as well. However, from the 1880s onwards to the advent of prohibition, there was also a very good market that developed for selling grapes for home winemaking for the immigrant families in San Francisco or on the east coast of the United States, and there were some very big vineyard companies operating during this time to meet the needs of immigrants in the big cities on the east and west coasts. Zinfandel was very popular for this segment of the market, as it had good, thick skins that made it much better for travel across country by railroad car than more delicate, thin-skinned red wine grapes, and it produced a hearty red wine that was quite familiar stylistically to much of the Italian immigrant population on the east coast, who made up the majority of customers for these shipped grapes. After the repeal of prohibition, zinfandel also became the key building block for many of the jug wines being produced by the restarted wineries in California, and as the jug wine business was where money was to be made in the wine trade in California in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, the grape's popularity amongst producers was quite high. As Mario Gemello, owner of one of the very first wineries reopened after prohibition's repeal in 1933, recalled in an interview back in 1992, in their very earliest days the Gemello family would mostly buy zinfandel from scattered small holders around them in the Santa Cruz Mountain foothills, as "we only made two kinds of wine then- Burgundy and Claret," and as the blend for the "Burgundy was heavier", the "zinfandel mostly went into the Burgundy."

It was not until the 1960s that the grape began to shed some of its jug wine reputation and start to step out on its own as a single varietal wine that appealed to the new clientele that was springing up for higher quality California wines, with pioneers for zinfandel including David Bennion and his partners up at Ridge Vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains, Joseph Swan in the Russian River Valley and Bob Trinchero at Sutter Home Winery. Ridge Vineyards produced their first varietal bottling of zinfandel in 1964, after David Bennion had re-bonded the old winery he and his partners had purchased that had belonged to William Short. This was just in time for the 1962 vintage, as the group had been very happy with the results of small quantities (half a barrel!) that he had made of cabernet sauvignon from their Monte Bello vineyard on weekends in the vintages of 1959, 1960 and 1961. In those very first years, the Ridge partners sold most of their grapes to none other than Mario Gemello. The 1964 Ridge Zinfandel was produced from old vine zinfandel vineyards owned by one of their neighbors down in the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains. As Paul Draper, longtime winemaker at Ridge and

currently this fine estate's CEO, recalls, "Dave Bennion, the partner who made the wines from 1962 to 1964, asked the Picchetti family if he could prune the several acres of 1890's zinfandel on their ranch near the bottom of Monte Bello ridge that they had recently abandoned" and this was the source of these first two vintages of Ridge zinfandel. These first two vintages of 1964 and 1965 are really the genesis of zinfandel as a single varietal bottling in the state, and Ridge Vineyards would become synonymous as the years went by with the potential of zinfandel as a serious, single varietal wine.

It was initially with an eye towards enhancing cash flow in the early years that the Ridge team turned to zinfandel as a varietal that could give them more wine to sell and assist in financing the cost of replanting cabernet sauvignon in the Monte Bello vineyard. As Paul Draper recounts, "as they began to replant the rest of the abandoned blocks on the property in the early sixties, they realized that they needed more income from the project as they went along to be able to afford the replanting and equipping of the winery," so "they got an import license and began to import both Bordeaux and Burgundy wines in barrel as well as the 1961 and 1962 Lynch Bages in bottle to supplement sales in the 1960s." Zinfandel initially just became another source for a cash flow wine to help with the costs of the early years, while waiting for the newly planted cabernet sauvignon to become old enough to use in their Monte Bello bottling. "They had been stopping at the Picchetti winery on the weekends as they drove up to their property and bought gallon jugs of their zinfandel which they told me were very enjoyable" Paul recounts, and "as they realized how much they needed more wine to sell, they went to the Picchettis and got permission to take care of the recently abandoned small block of zinfandel and made those first wines in 1964 and 1965."

It was almost by happenstance that zinfandel went from being a sturdy foundation for blending in jug wines to a single varietal wine of distinction with those early zinfandel bottlings at Ridge, for David Bennion only knew one way to make wine in those days, so the zinfandel was treated with the same loving care as his Monte Bello cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay. Paul Draper recounts, "the partners had not tasted any Zinfandel, let alone much wine at all, until after they purchased Short's Cabernet vineyard" on Monte Bello ridge, and "you must realize that in that era, Bordeaux wines were the best known and making Cabernet became their aim from the beginning." When I asked Paul if the partners just took their winemaking techniques, which were very natural and minimalist in approach, and applied it to the zinfandel grapes they brought in from the Picchetti vineyard he assented, "you are right that because they started by making Cabernet- and making it very simply and traditionally- they carried those exact techniques of picking at ripeness, but not over ripeness, using extended maceration and aging in oak barrels" for their zinfandels, "not the twenty thousand gallon redwood upright tanks, as was typical for Zinfandel" in those days. The wine had great appeal for the new owners of Ridge Vineyards, as it was approachable very early on after its bottling, which was dramatically different from the Bordeaux-inspired, beautifully-structured cabernet sauvignon that they were turning out from the Monte Bello vineyard right from the start, so the zinfandels gave their clientele a Ridge wine they could drink right away, while tucking those early cases of Monte Bello cabernet in their cellars for long-term aging. It did not take the team at Ridge long to realize that zinfandel would become as important for the new winery as their cabernet sauvignon, and when Paul Draper was incorporated into the team in 1969, one of his earliest projects was scouring northern California wine country for more parcels of old vine zinfandel to add to their portfolio.

The Ridge Vineyard's first "Geyserville" bottling of zinfandel was produced in 1966, using fruit from vines planted in 1882 in the Alexander Valley vineyard and owned at that time by the Trentadue family and which continues to be the source of this cuvée at Ridge down to the present time. As Paul Draper recalled of that first Geyserville bottling, "in 1965 we approached the Trentadue family, who had recently moved from being prune and apricot farmers in Santa Clara Valley to being grape growers in Sonoma in Geyserville township, with the idea of buying a few acres of abandoned vineyard land and a winery building which they had bought in 1957, but had never used" and which was "located above our vineyard on Monte Bello." This winery was originally founded by Dr. Osea Perrone in 1885 and was purchased by Ridge Vineyards in 1968 and is today Ridge's beautifully restored Monte Bello winery. He continues, "as we got into our discussions, we asked about the old 1880's zinfandel vines on the ranch they had recently bought" in Geyserville, and "they offered a few tons in 1966 that came in very ripe and we made our first Geyserville as a desert wine we called Essence" in the 1966 vintage. Since that first vintage, Ridge has produced a zinfandel from this Geyserville parcel every year and took over the farming of the vineyard in 1990. Other single vineyard bottlings of zinfandel soon followed, made from fruit purchased at the Dusi Ranch in 1967 and the first Jimsamore vineyard bottling of zinfandel the following year. In 1972, Ridge added to its old vine zinfandel bottlings with the release of their first Lytton Springs bottling, produced from vines planted in 1902 in the Valley Vista Vineyard on Lytton Springs Road in Dry Creek Valley. The winery chose to name the bottling with the geographic name of Lytton Springs, rather than the vineyard name. As Paul recalls, "we had by now committed to producing both Cabernet and Zinfandel in the future as the basis for our operation, though the original reason had been to have enough wine to sell to survive." The Lytton Springs bottling would quickly become a benchmark bottling of zinfandel excellence, but in 1977 the owner of the Valley Vista Vineyard decided to keep all the grapes for his own wine, which he renamed Lytton Springs Vineyard (with the Ridge team's permission) and Ridge would not produce another bottling of their Lytton Springs Zinfandel until the 1983 vintage, when one of the winery's shareholders purchased an adjacent vineyard also planted with old vine zinfandel.

The year of 1968 seems to have been another watershed vintage for zinfandel in northern California, as this was the first vintage that Joe Swan produced at his new winery in the Russian River Valley, from old zinfandel vines that he had found already planted on his ranch when he purchased it in late 1967 (the only vineyards already in the ground on the property at this time), and 1968 was also the year that Bob Trinchero made his first single varietal zinfandel bottling from grapes he purchased up in Amador County and which would serve as the cornerstone to one of the biggest zinfandel success stories in California in the years to come. Both of these wineries, along with Ridge Vineyards, became synonymous with the potential of zinfandel, and many other important wineries in northern California soon followed their lead. It is not overstatement to note that many winemakers at this time in northern California thought that perhaps zinfandel would become the red grape variety that they would make their reputations on in the future (remember that this was still several years before Steven Spurrier's "Judgement of Paris" tasting in 1976 would really put California on the international wine map), as it was not an uncommon perception amongst winemakers in this era that the long-term aging potential of zinfandel was thought to be at least the equal of cabernet sauvignon and held out considerably more potential in the state than pinot noir!

Zinfandel throughout its history has often been a wine that showed off a more robust personality than cabernet sauvignon in California wine country, and I imagine that there are several reasons for this propensity on the part of winemakers to champion its more muscular side over the years. One, of course, is the inherent personality of the grape, as its thick skins naturally led to a bit more extracted style of wine. Certainly its import in its earliest decades of its history in California as the grape of choice for Italian immigrants in the area, producing wine either at their own wineries or in their homes for personal consumption, would have also led to more hearty examples being produced. Again, looking back to Mario Gemello, one of California wine's earliest pioneers in the post-prohibition era, he noted in an interview conducted back in the 1990s, a lot of home winemakers across the US who were buying zinfandel to produce their house wines in their basements or garages would have naturally fermented their wines up to higher alcohol levels as a means of protecting the wines against bacterial spoilage, and then cutting these heady wines with a significant percentage of water when they were served. Similarly, as color was considered very important (and often elusive) element in the jug wine era after the repeal of prohibition- and which predated the advent of coloring agents like "mega-purple"- zinfandel was favored in the blends for the darker colors and more body it would bring to cuvées that included all sorts of other grapes as well.

However, when we start to see a real renaissance for this varietal in the early 1970s, it is the more elegant and "serious" renditions of the grape fashioned by producers such as Joe Swan, Paul Draper and the like that really made others in the wine trade take note of the grape and start to consider its potential as a great wine in the region. None of the zinfandels from this era from the likes of Ridge Vineyards or Joseph Swan Vineyards lacked for depth or stuffing, but power was not necessarily their *raison d'être*, as these zinfandel pioneers sought to imbue their bottlings from this varietal with balance, complexity and the potential for positive evolution in the bottle. Given how the grape tends to ripen on the vine- quite unevenly within its bunches and quite variably from bunch to bunch- I have often wondered how these top zinfandel winemakers were able to fashion such classically-proportioned wines in this era, as the decade of the 1970s certainly saw its very fair share of warm and ripe vintages. Again, I turned to Paul Draper for insight on this and he noted that "the reason we found for the lower alcohol" levels for zinfandel "of the early days for us was based on the fact that old zinfandel vines (those more than sixty years-old) typically produced full flavor at alcohol levels in the thirteen percent range." He continued, "younger vines- say ten to forty years-old- do not develop full flavor until the fourteen percent range," and "all of our zinfandels from the '60s and '70s- except for the York Creek starting in 1975- were from very old vines." However, Paul is quick to point out that the advent of zinfandel as a very high alcohol, overripe wine in the 1990s, ultimately had little to do with vine age and was really a reflection of winemakers' preferences for producing overripe renditions of this varietal, in response to market-driven demand for high octane California wines in general by younger wine drinkers in the United States and a few influential critics. In his view, the demand really gained steam with the warm reception of very high alcohol cabernets in the 1997 vintage, and though "there are many excuses given" for the high levels of alcohol in today's zinfandels, "from higher conversion rates for yeasts to global warming, but the truth is simply the choice of producers to make over ripe wines for the American market."



Once zinfandel really began to become popular in the market in the 1970s, it did not take too many years for some winemakers to start to consider pushing the limits a bit with this varietal, and as early as the late 1970s, we started to see the very first push for higher alcohol and super-powerful versions of zinfandel as a cork-finished, single varietal bottling. As Bob Trinchero of Sutter Home Vineyards noted back in the late 1990s, in the late '70s there was a real trend amongst some winemakers producing zinfandel to make “monster wines” with the very high alcohol levels that we sadly still see in many incarnations of the grape from wineries such as Turley, Martinelli and the like, where seemingly the Late Harvest cuvées, which were made with some frequency earlier in the decade, were abandoned (as they had never really sold all that well for wineries who produced them) and everything thrown in together in the vats and zinfandel eventually became the poster child for overripe, high octane red wines in California. When the march for higher alcohol and more residual sugar in “regular” bottlings of zinfandel was in full swing, there were still a number of producers who resisted the easy money of this trend and continued to fashion wines in the style of the late 1960's and early 1970's pioneers, with folks such as Mike Dashe, Doug Nalle Joel Peterson and others joining the ranks of Paul Draper and Joe Swan in continuing to produce zinfandels of more traditional balance. However, the list of first rate wineries that gave up on this varietal during the market switch from a more classically styled wine to a very heady and often overtly sweet wine is long and it is easy to daydream about what might have been if producers such as Burgess, Château Montelena, Mayacamas, Kalin Cellars, Ric Forman and Randy Dunn during his days at Caymus had continued to pursue zinfandel with the same passion as Paul Draper and Joe Swan during the decade of the 1980s!

Sadly, zinfandel has not been quite as fortunate as some other grape varieties in the last decade in witnessing a stylistic renaissance that replicates what has been done with other major grape varietal bottlings across the state and the grape remains generally synonymous with the stylistic excesses of very high alcohol, residual sugar and over the top styling that first washed over so many other varietal bottlings in the decade of the 1990s. Today, this over the top style of wine is now in retreat in many top cellars with grapes such as cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay, pinot noir and syrah and a new golden age seems imminent at so many important addresses across the state in recent years, but zinfandel remains a wine where the lion's share of bottlings on the market today remain very high in alcohol, overripe and patently uninteresting to a classically-aligned palate. Happily, there remains a small cadre of holdouts against the over the top style of zinfandel- led of course still by Ridge Vineyards and Joseph Swan Vineyards- but in general, zinfandel's salad days are now in the past or in a holding pattern waiting for another wave of new generation winegrowers to embrace the style of zinfandel of the 1970s in their own wineries and start to produce wines from this grape that can mirror what folks like Kevin Harvey, Wells Guthrie, Alex Davis or many others have done with pinot noir and syrah.

The focus of this article is to trace the history of zinfandel over the course of its two finest decades in the twentieth century, the 1970s and 1980s and see how the wines have stood the test of time. I have been able over the last few years to acquire odd bottles at auction of older zinfandels and been treated to a few great old bottles as well from fellow collectors or winery principals out of their cellars. I have included just a couple of notes on younger zinfandels in this feature- and those from the modern, over the top camp- as they crossed my path at one or another of the zinfandel tastings I organized for this report, and I figured that I might as well toss their notes into the mix as well. Despite the very ambitious hopes of pioneers such as Dave Bennion, Paul Draper and Joe Swan, it seems pretty clear from these tastings that the grape is not ultimately quite as ageworthy as its counterparts of cabernet sauvignon, pinot noir or syrah. Or, perhaps a better way to phrase this is that even when the zinfandel age long and gracefully, the wines do not quite develop the same degree of complexity (particularly on the palate) as some of these other varietals do with thirty or forty years of bottle age. There is no shame in this, as a great many of the wines reported on below are truly fine old California wines and a great pleasure to drink today. However, others have not aged as elegantly as I might have hoped, and it seems pretty clear, that excluding a few true artists with the grape, most good producers' zinfandels tends to drop quite a bit of complexity on the palate as the wines get up there in age. A goodly number of the wines I tasted from the 1970s, and several from the 1980s as well, were far more complex aromatically than they were today on the palate, and perhaps this is just how zinfandel ages over the long haul. Many are still very good wines on their own, but more than a few of my friends who joined me for one of the old zinfandel tastings I organized for this article commented that "it was really a bit of hard work getting through a whole lineup of these wines- let's not do this again!" While I might have been just a touch more enthusiastic than they (having had a chance to taste quite a few other old bottles outside of this series of tastings that were truly stunning), their sentiments are not entirely off the mark in this regard and it would seem that, with a few outstanding exceptions, the real sweet spot in the aging curve for zinfandel would seem to be between the ages of ten and twenty-five.

One of the reasons that zinfandel from the 1970s and 1980s may not prove to be quite as cellar-worthy as a wine such as cabernet sauvignon from this same era also has to do with winery

economics. As Paul Draper pointed out in our conversation, wineries would typically wait to pick their zinfandel grapes until after they had brought in their cabernet sauvignon or chardonnay grapes, as these wines sold for higher prices and were therefore of more value to winery principals. Paul comments: "I think you know that zinfandel, when temperatures go up during harvest, over-ripens more rapidly than any other variety, so if you are not on top of your sampling- or don't care- you quickly have a wine in the 15% range." With this in mind, it may well be that the advent of zinfandel as the very high octane wine which we sadly know today may have come around as much out of happenstance, due to it being picked after the grapes for the more expensive wines had been brought in, for, as Paul recalls, "as producers saw Zinfandel beginning to make a name for itself in the market, they began to jump in in the late '70s and '80s, but because they picked their other more valuable grapes first and left the zinfandel for last, their alcohols were high." Paul continued, back in this era, "the market in general, and especially on the East Coast, was put off by trying a bottle of this 'new' variety with their dinner and finding it tasting more like port" and consequently, "for a number of years most Zinfandels did not sell, though our style did." But, in the 1990s, Paul noted that the influx of a new generation of younger wine drinkers in the US, most of whom did not have a base of knowledge of the more moderate alcohol wines from Europe as their tasting foundation- which had been the case with previous generations of American wine drinkers- started to embrace the more powerful and alcoholic style of wines from California and "the popularity of the over-ripe style of Zinfandels grew."

Another element that should be mentioned in this context, is zinfandel's propensity to keep its acids very high until quite late in its maturation cycle on the vine, even when sugars have already climbed to sufficiently high Brix. This was first pointed out to me by Rod Berglund, proprietor and winemaker at Joseph Swan Vineyards since 1988, when I was chatting with him a few years back about the alcohol level of his more recent vintages of zinfandel, that were in the fourteen and a half range, whereas almost all of his other wines were quite close to thirteen percent. He noted that "often one just has to let the grapes hang, because the acids simply have not budged, despite the sugars starting to climb, and you just have to wait until the acidity starts to ripen and drop before you can start picking zinfandel." Paul Draper noted that this is more a function of the cooler microclimates in the Russian River Valley, as "Rod's comments apply more to the cool climate, high acid Zinfandels of his immediate area" and the slow drop of acidity in the ripening grapes would be far less of an issue in warmer places such as Geyserville, Lytton Springs or Amador County, where a lot of old zinfandel vineyards remain. The other characteristic to keep in mind for the zinfandels of the '70s and '80s, and which I was unaware of until a few years ago, is that the practice of "watering back" zinfandel has a long history in California wine, as it was seen as a necessary element for keeping the grape's natural tendency to higher octane wines in check. If a winemaker in this era might be looking for a wine of balance to age for the long haul, a bit of water addition to the must was seen as not a whole lot different than a Burgundian *vigneron* chapitalizing their must in a leaner year. The difference between this practice today and back in the '70s and '80s, is that a lot of present day winemakers will let the grapes hang until the Brix offer potential alcohol way north of sixteen percent and then water back to the high fourteens or low fifteens, so that all of the overripe, prune elements in the aromatics and flavors are locked into the wines. Back in Joe Swan's era, a high thirteen percent wine of more classic flavor profile might be watered back to around thirteen percent for the balance to age. As Paul Draper notes, "I knew Joe well and he had started as a home wine

maker when living in Salt Lake City, so he had no reservations about adjusting alcohols to suit his taste” and consequently “his were never high.” He continues, discussing how to produce great, classically-balanced zinfandels in this day and age: “looking for flavor ripeness is crucial, not phenolic ripeness- the latter is another excuse for making over-ripe wines or for ignorance.”

As the notes below will attest, when zinfandel is made in a more classical style, such as the wines that were first bottled as single varietals under cork in the 1960s by producers such as Ridge Vineyards and Joseph Swan Vineyards, it can provide a very lovely bottle for mid to longer-term cellaring. It may not quite hit the same high notes at age forty as a Monte Bello or Mayacamas cabernet sauvignon, but this is not to say that a well-balanced bottle of thirty or forty year-old zinfandel is not a real treat to drink, and it is really a shame that after the decade of the 1980s, there were so few producers who were still willing to make zinfandel in the more classical style that was ushered in all the way back with the release of the 1964 and 1965 Ridge bottlings. This is not to say that all of the old zinfandels from the ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s are world class wines, as there are several notes below on wines which I took a chance on at auction and was not brilliantly repaid for the wager, and several old zins which came out of friends’ cellars at our tastings and were pretty tough to warm up to as well. As the grape was still a “second class citizen” in these decades, one did not see every producer willing, or capable, of making and raising their zinfandels with the same attention to detail and expense as was the case at wineries such as Ridge, Joseph Swan or other top producers of the varietal, and one can understand this, as not everyone could get the same price for their zinfandel as these top estates.

There were still many zinfandels made in the 1970s that continued to be aged in large redwood barrels, rather than smaller oak barrels, as had been the tradition back in the forties and fifties when it was a grape to be used in jug wine blends. These wines for the most part did not age as well as those raised in smaller oak casks. And there were more marginal producers back in the day who latched onto zinfandel as a grape that they would produce, due to it being so much less expensive to buy than cabernet sauvignon or chardonnay, once the momentum of the latter half of the 1970s started to push bulk grape prices higher. Some producers, such as Sutter Home, had great success with zinfandel at these lower price points, whereas others, simply did not have the same skill sets in the cellars to replicate this success in the more value conscious end of the market. And lest we forget, the market phenomenon of White Zinfandel got started all the way back in 1977 at Sutter Home, when Bob Trinchero bled off some juice from his zinfandel vats to further concentrate his must for his red bottling, and eventually fermented and sold off this *saignée* as White Zinfandel. As this wine became a very lucrative market force in the 1980s and 1990s, this further hurt the reputation of zinfandel as a red wine varietal worthy of care and classical raising in the cellar. But, the bumps in the road for zinfandel in the last few decades should not take away any luster of the very real success this wine had in the decade of the 1970s and 1980s, and there is no reason not to look back fondly on the fine quarter century of zinfandel that was ushered in with the release of the 1964 and 1965 vintages at Ridge Vineyards, and which still continues on discreetly at a few well-selected addresses in the state.

The following wines have all been tasted over the last couple of years, as I have long been thinking of writing this feature celebrating the good old style of California zinfandel. A few notes have appeared previously in estate features, as the one on Joseph Swan Vineyards a few years back, but most are recently written in anticipation of producing this article.

2000 Turley “Hayne Vineyard” Zinfandel (Napa Valley)

The old zinfandel vines at Hayne Vineyard were planted in 1902 and 1903 and this wine seems like such a colossal waste of good, old vine fruit. The octane here is a crazy 16.7 percent and, not surprisingly, the wine has aged abysmally. The nose is at least interesting in its rather unprecedented overripe profile of raisins, marinated orange peel, peanut butter and wood ash. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, jammy, formless and overtly hot on the backend, with a creamy texture on the attack, but zero complexity, zero structure and very little that would ever make me want to taste another glass. Sadly, the finish is not particularly short, which just prolongs the unpleasantness as the wine lingers on the backend. I cannot imagine anyone actually still drinking this wine today. It could single-handedly bring back the Road Kill series. That said, it is not dead yet and could continue to disillusion wine lovers for at least another decade. 2015-2025. **63.**

1994 St. Francis “Pagani Ranch” Zinfandel (Sonoma County)

The 1994 St. Francis “Pagani Ranch” bottling of zinfandel purports to be 14.5 percent alcohol, but it seems quite a bit higher than that to my palate. The wine is sealed with a plastic cork, but surprisingly, had not oxidized and had stayed fresh on both the nose and palate. However, this is not to be confused with good. The overripe and jammy nose offers up a predictable mélange of black raspberries, pepper, raisins and a bit of chocolate sauce. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, flabby and hot, with no structure or focus, a creamy palate impression and solid length and grip on the heady finish. Not completely undrinkable, but I would never drink it. 2015-2025. **83.**

1991 Williams Selyem “Russian River Valley” Zinfandel

Burt Williams had an excellent reputation for zinfandel during his days as winemaker at his and Ed Selyem’s winery in Healdsburg (in addition to being one of California’s finest pinot noir producers during his era), however, this is the only vintage of his zinfandel that I have ever had the pleasure to try, as it has been mostly pinot noir from the estate that I have bought and cellared in the past. The 1991 Williams Selyem zinfandel is certainly not shy on alcohol, tipping the scales at a pretty heady 15.6 percent (perhaps a reflection of Rod Berglund’s observation about waiting for acids to drop with Sonoma zinfandel vineyards?), but the wine has aged surprisingly well and is really not too bad of a drink at age twenty-four. The bouquet offers up a ripe and fairly complex blend of baked cherries, chocolate, lovely, brambly spice tones, a nice touch of damp, autumnal soil, cedar and a bit of fruitcake in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, but with the varietal’s good acids keeping the wine focused and vibrant, with a good core, melted tannins and impressive length and grip on the finish. There is a little backend heat in evidence, and though the wine is a bit plodding on the backend at this octane level, all in all, this is really a most impressively balanced bottle. Given the fact that I had no expectations prior to opening it that a 15.6 percent zinfandel could stay the course over nearly a quarter of a century, this was a very pleasant surprise! Live and learn. 2015-2025. **88.**

1985 Ridge Vineyards “Lytton Springs” Zinfandel (Dry Creek Valley)

The 1985 Lytton Springs bottling, which was only the third from their new source of old vine zinfandel on Lytton Springs Road, includes some of the other grapes traditionally found in the field blend of old zinfandel vineyards, with the ’85’s *cépages* being eighty percent zinfandel,

eleven percent carignane and nine percent grenache. I sold this wine back in my early retail days in copious quantities (and drank many, many bottles) and should have tucked a case away for later in its life, as at age thirty, the wine is drinking beautifully. The bouquet is deep and complex, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of desiccated cherries and raspberries, a bit of spiced meat, Provençal herbs and spices, a striking base of soil, woodsmoke and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with an excellent core, melting tannins, good acids and lovely length and grip on the focused and classic finish. I am sure this wine has been fully mature for nearly twenty years, but it is drinking so well today that it is hard not to come to the conclusion that all of it should have been held until its thirtieth birthday! Lovely juice. 2015-2035. **93.**

1984 Rafanelli Vineyards “Dry Creek Valley” Zinfandel

Rafanelli has long had a reputation as one of the top producers of zinfandel in all of California, and though I have lost track of how they are making wines in this day and age, I loved their wines throughout the decade of the 1980s. Their 1984 zinfandel, which tips the scales at a very economical 13.5 percent alcohol has aged very well indeed and continues to cruise along at its apogee. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of dried berries, cigar ash, a touch of menthol, brambly spice tones, forest floor and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and nicely spicy on the palate, with a good core, still a touch of tannin and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. The wine is not as complex on the palate as it is on the nose at this point in its evolution, but it is still quite structurally sound and continues to drink well. 2015-2025+. **88.**

1984 Joseph Swan Vineyards “Northern Sonoma” Zinfandel

The Northern Sonoma bottling of zinfandel from Joseph Swan Vineyards back in the mid-1980s was sourced from a vineyard directly across the street from Lytton Springs vineyard. This is a dynamite bottle of zinfandel that it is at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability, but shows every likelihood of continuing to drink beautifully for at least a couple more decades. The deep, complex and very classy nose jumps from the glass in a blend of cassis, cigar box, lovely soil tones, coffee and a classic spicy zinfandel topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and beautifully delineated, with fine mid-palate depth, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the very complex and focused finish. This seems slightly lower in octane than the '86 Sonoma Coast zin (I did not take note of the relative alcohol levels on the two bottlings), and as a result it really shows off some precision on both the nose and palate. High class zin! 2011-2030. **92.**

1983 Joseph Swan Vineyards “Sonoma” Zinfandel

1983 was not a favored year climactically in northern California, with the wines lacking a bit of their customary ripeness and rather tough and chewy when they were first released in 1985 and 1986. However, I have had several in recent years that have aged impressively well and it seems that perhaps this vintage has proven to be better than expected. Certainly, this bottle of 1983 Joseph Swan Zinfandel has aged gracefully and is now drinking with plenty of depth and style, as it offers up a fine nose of dried currants, coffee, *pain épice*, a touch of fruitcake, a lovely base of autumnal soil tones and a topnote of Cuban cigar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and quite suave on the attack, with a fine core, melted tannins and superb focus and grip on the complex and still quite vibrant finish. Joe Swan really made gorgeous zinfandels and his 1983 Sonoma bottling is now at its apogee and with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2015-2030. **91.**



1982 Ridge Vineyards “York Creek” Zinfandel (Spring Mountain)

The 1982 York Creek Zinfandel from Ridge is a lovely wine that tips the scales at 12.8 percent alcohol and is comprised of a blend of eighty-six percent zinfandel and fourteen percent petite sirah. At age thirty-two the wine is still bright and tasty, with no signs of slowing down anytime soon, as it wafts from the glass in a suave mélange of raspberries, fruitcake, saddle leather, baking spices and a touch of grilled venison. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite seamless on the attack, with a good core of fruit, still a whisper of remaining tannin and a long, tangy and well-balanced finish. This is not overly complex, but it remains well-preserved and will continue to drink well for at least another decade. 2014-2025. **87.**

1981 Cakebread Cellars “Beatty Ranch” Zinfandel (Howell Mountain)

The Beatty Ranch is another of those old vine parcels of zinfandel scattered around wine country in northern California, having been planted in the early twentieth century and dry farmed by Mike Beatty since the early 1970s. Back in this era, Ridge and Cakebread took all of the old vine zinfandel produced on the ranch, with Randy Dunn buying much of the cabernet sauvignon that is also planted here. The 1981 Cakebread Cellars bottling comes in at an even thirteen percent alcohol and is a lovely bottle of zin that is still in its prime, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, a touch of fruitcake, lovely spice tones, coffee, bonfires and a very good base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and not quite as complex on the attack as the nose suggests, but with a good core, melted tannins and a long and tangy finish.

This is a good, solid bottle of old zinfandel, but not quite in the league of the best of its era. 2015-2025+. **86.**

1979 Burgess Cellars Zinfandel (Napa Valley)

The 1979 Burgess Cellars Zinfandel is just a touch riper than the 1978, coming in at 14.3 percent alcohol, and it has not aged quite as well as its older sibling. The wine is still a quite fine bottle of mature zin, offering up scents of roasted berries, dried currants, a touch of spiced meats, soil tones, a dollop of coffee grounds and a gentle topnote of raisin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely developed, with a good core, melting tannins and good length and grip on the fully mature finish. This is just a touch lacking in complexity, but otherwise a good drink and still with plenty of life ahead of it. 2012-2025. **87.**

1979 Fetzer Vineyards “Scharffenberger Vineyard” Zinfandel (Mendocino County)

The 1979 Scharffenberger Vineyard bottling of zinfandel from the Fetzer family is a lovely bottle, and really underscores just how good this estate’s wines were back in the day—despite the family always selling them for a very fair price! The wine hailed from old head-pruned vines on the eastern side of Ukiah Valley, was raised in American oak casks and tips the scales at 13.6 percent. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of baked cherries and raspberries, grilled venison, coffee, a nice touch of *garrigue*, a good signature of soil and a topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, tangy acids, melted tannins and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. There is just a whisper of backend heat here at 13.6 percent, but nice integration and very good complexity and the wine should continue to cruise along nicely for at least another fifteen to twenty years. A fine bottle. 2015-2030+. **90.**

1979 Château Montelena Zinfandel (Napa Valley)

I had higher hopes for the ’79 zinfandel from Château Montelena than the wine ultimately warranted, as the wine no longer has quite the sufficient stuffing to carry its 14.3 percent alcohol without showing a bit of heat on the backend. The nose is still quite lovely in its mélange of dried red berries, malty tones, orange peel, plenty of spices, a bit of bell pepper and roasted venison. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, very soft and completely resolved, with the alcohol now showing a bit on the backend, as the fruit has faded ahead of the heat on the rather delicate finish. This got more prune-y and oxidative over the course of the several hours that I drank it, and I will serve my remaining bottle to a larger crowd, as it was really not a bad drink for the first forty-five minutes or so, before the raisins started to take over a bit. Drink up. **85.**

1979 Ridge “Monte Bello” Zinfandel (Santa Cruz Mountains)

This is a blend from the Jimsamora and Righetti Vineyards (both located on the Monte Bello ridge), and in the less than ripe year of 1979 weighed in at a delicate 12% alcohol. It has been my experience in the past that zinfandels under 13.5% alcohol are much better balanced for longer-term cellaring, and though this wine was a bit past its apogee, I am sure that it had survived as well as it did because of its lower alcohol. The nose is now rather elegant and delicate, but still quite interesting, offering up scents of raspberry, cherry, ginger honey, woodsmoke and coffee. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and stylish on the attack, but now falls off into a rather short and clipped finish. I would have loved to have seen this wine at its peak, but it has clearly been in very gentle decline for a good decade or so. Drink up. **86.**

1978 Burgess Cellars Zinfandel (Napa Valley)

I have a very warm spot in my heart for this wine, as a re-release of this bottling at age five or six was the very first wine I ever spent more than ten dollars a bottle on back in my nascent wine drinking days at college. I was very curious to try a bottle when I saw one at auction last year and I think I only had to pay twenty dollars for the wine- nearly thirty years after I sprung for it the first time back at the university! The wine has aged brilliantly, probably in part due to its fairly reasonable octane level of 14.1 percent, as it offers up a beautiful and mature nose of dried berries, a bit of fruit cake, cigar ash, coffee, a touch of mesquite, gentle notes of soil, meaty tones and a lovely topnote of zinfandel spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impressively transparent, with tangy acids, melted tannins and just a whisper of backend heat now starting to poke through as the fruit gets more delicate at its relatively advanced age. A beautiful bottle of mature zin that will want drinking up in the next several years, as the first signs of structural fraying are starting to show with the bit of alcohol poking out on the backend today. 2013-2020. **91.**

1978 Caymus Vineyards Zinfandel (Napa Valley)

Ah, the old days at Caymus Vineyards, when the wines were really exceptional and the prices were still fairly reasonable! Back in these days, Randy Dunn was still making the wines here at Caymus and there were a lot of really superb wines produced under this winery's label. This superb old zinfandel tipped the scales at a very suave thirteen percent alcohol, and it is probably this inherent sense of fine balance out of the blocks that has allowed it to age so gracefully and to really still be drinking beautifully at age thirty-five. The lovely and mature nose wafts from the glass in a classy blend of dried raspberries, coffee, charred wood, brambly overtones, cigar ash and a lovely topnote of zinfandel spiciness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, round and impressively complex, with lovely focus and balance, good acids and just a whisper of remaining tannin on the long and suave finish. This is a beautiful example of what this varietal could do before the modernists came along and turned zinfandel into Frankenstein's monster. 2013-2020+. **91.**

1978 Mastantuono "Dusi Vineyard" Zinfandel (San Luis Obispo)

Pasquale Mastantuono started his San Luis Obispo winery all the way back in 1967, and specialized in zinfandel and barbera. The Dusi Vineyard, from which this wine originated, is planted with old, head-pruned zinfandel vines that are dry-farmed in the very chalky soils of this vineyard. The 1978 was surprisingly low in alcohol for this quite ripe vintage, coming in at only 12.5 percent alcohol, and the wine was very snappy with a bit of unripe acidity as a result. This has of course kept it quite fresh over the years, but it would be hard to term it pleasurable to drink. The complex bouquet offers up an exotic, low octane and dill pickly nose of red berries, chalky soil tones, cigarette ash, pickling spices and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, tangy and still plenty lively, with good complexity, snappy acids and good length and grip on the noticeably underripe finish. I am not really sure why this wine is so modestly ripe in a warm vintage, but maybe the vines shut down in drought conditions for part of the summer? 2015-2035+. **80.**

1978 Ridge Vineyards "York Creek" Zinfandel (Spring Mountain)

The 1978 Ridge "York Creek" Zinfandel was made from a blend of eighty-five percent zinfandel and fifteen percent petit sirah, and was pretty ripe by the standards of this era in California wine, as it came in at 13.9 percent alcohol. Of course, this perfectly reflects Paul Draper's comments that with zinfandel, younger vine fruit achieves "full flavor" around fourteen

percent alcohol and old vines around thirteen percent, and the York Creek bottling was always their youngest vine zinfandel cuvée. At age thirty-four, the wine is still drinking quite well, offering up a deep and ripe nose of black cherries, chocolate, leather, briary spice tones, cigar smoke and a touch of chipotle pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a good core, melted tannins and good length on the ripe and slightly jammy finish. The higher octane here has robbed the wine of a bit of precision and focus, but it is still quite cool in the mouth and the wine is well-preserved and quite enjoyable to drink. 2014-2020+. **89.**

Trenton Cellars Zinfandel (Joseph Swan Vineyards- Blend of Fruit from 1977 and 1978)

The zinfandel produced under the “Trenton Cellars” label was a blend of fruit from the 1977 and 1978 vintages, with the ’77 zinfandel hailing from a vineyard in Mendocino and the ’78 from a vineyard source in San Luis Obispo. No doubt both of these vineyard sources were new to Joe Swan at the time, as they followed soon on the heels of his losing access to the zinfandel from Teldeschi Ranch in Sonoma after the ’76 harvest, which had been his flagship zinfandel bottling since his second vintage in 1969. As Rod Berglund likes to joke, “Joe quickly learned the error of his ways and went back to sourcing solely Sonoma County fruit for his zinfandels.” The Trenton Cellars blend has aged beautifully and was drinking very well at the time of our May vertical tasting, as it offers up a deep and beautiful nose of brambly fruit, coffee, *garrigue*, cinnamon stick and soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and spicy, with a lovely core of fruit, modest tannins and fine length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. I did not take a note on the octane of this bottling, but I have to assume it was well under fourteen percent, as the wine has aged in a very elegant direction and shows no signs of slowing down any time soon. 2011-2025. **90.**

1976 Ridge Vineyards “Lytton Springs” Zinfandel (Dry Creek Valley)

The ’76 Ridge Lytton Springs Zinfandel clearly struggled with the drought of this year and the vines must have shut down for quite a bit of the growing season, as the wine only managed to crawl to an ABV level of 11.6 percent. Now, I am usually a pretty strident fan of lower octane wines, but this wine clearly never quite got over the hurdle of adequate ripeness and really is a pretty petite version of this great bottling. The nose still shows off pretty good depth and complexity after thirty-six years of bottle age, offering up notes of dried berries, coffee, heather, soil tones and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is medium-full and balanced, but really pretty short, with a respectable core of fruit and sound complexity, but rather minor intensity by the standards of this great wine. Not bad- particularly when viewed within the context of the challenging 1976 vintage, but not a great old vintage of Lytton Springs. 2012-2020+. **86.**

1976 Sterling Vineyards Zinfandel (Napa Valley)

According to Ric Forman, he produced six to eight vintages of zinfandel during his tenure at Sterling Vineyards (1969 through 1978), which was made from a small parcel of vines right below the winery in Napa Valley. The wine was raised in older French oak casks and no more than three hundred cases was produced in any given vintage. The 1976 Sterling zinfandel is still a vibrant wine at its apogee, which is probably not surprising, given that it was crafted at an even thirteen percent alcohol and no doubt started out life with the same impeccable balance it retains as it closes in on its fortieth birthday. The complex bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of dried red berries, black plum, gentle meatiness, a bit of *garrigue*, coffee, a good base of

autumnal soil, gentle cedary notes, zinfandel spiciness and a touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely structured, with a good core, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the still moderately tannic finish. Given the drought conditions in 1976, I have to imagine that this wine started out life quite tightly-knit and tannic and has taken its time blossoming, but this has given it the chassis to continue to drink well for at least another couple of decades. A very good example, which is hardly surprising, as Ric Forman seemed to never miss a beat during his tenure at Sterling. Good juice. 2015-2035. **90.**

1976 Joseph Swan Vineyards Zinfandel (Dry Creek Valley)

I reported on this wine back in my feature on the winery a few years ago, and I was very happy to have a chance to cross paths with a pristine bottle of this vintage over the summer of 2015. The 1976 Swan zinfandel, which was the last year that Joe had access to fruit from the Teldeschi Vineyard in Dry Creek Valley, has aged very well indeed and is drinking at its apogee. The wine offers up superb vibrancy in its complex nose of dark berries, coffee, brambly zin overtones, cigar ash, lovely notes of *garrigue* and a classy base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, still a touch of backend tannin and lovely length and grip on the focused and gently roasted finish. As 1976 was a drought vintage in California, the wines have often showed a bit of a roasted quality from the growing season, but this is very nicely managed in this excellent bottle. Clearly, the last bottle of this wine I tasted I underrated a tad. 2015-2030+. **92.**



The rolling hills of vines of Joseph Swan's the Trenton Estate Vineyard in the Russian River Valley.

1975 Cuvaision Zinfandel

In contrast to the 1975 Cuvaision cabernet, which is not entirely clean, the 1975 Cuvaision Zinfandel is absolutely *à point* and is drinking with great beauty and resolution. The wine is only 12.3 percent alcohol, which is probably the reason that it is still so enjoyable at nearly forty years

of age, as it is a perfectly balanced and very complex middleweight that belies today's fantasy that zinfandel will not age gracefully. The bouquet is deep, complex and vibrant in its mélange of desiccated raspberries, red currants, beautiful spice tones redolent of cardamom and cloves, sweet cigar wrapper and soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, just a whisper of remaining tannin, a fine core of sweet fruit and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This was my second of two bottles I bought at auction a couple of years ago, and both were excellent. Just a lovely bottle of old zinfandel with plenty of life still in it. 2014-2025. **91.**

1975 Zinfandel "Lytton Springs"- Ridge Vineyards

The 1975 Lytton Springs Zinfandel is not quite as vibrant today as its 1974 sibling, but the wine continues to drink beautifully and will offer up a lot of complexity and silky pleasure for at least another dozen years. This is about as low octane as zinfandel can be, coming in at 11.7 percent alcohol and offering up a complex and fully mature bouquet of red and black raspberries, fruitcake, lovely spice tones, bonfires, dried eucalyptus, a touch of coffee and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and intensely flavored, with excellent focus and grip and a very, very long, low fat and zesty finish. I really like this wine, but it is not quite in the same league as Ridge's legendary 1974 Lytton Springs bottling. 2013-2025. **90.**

1975 Ridge Vineyards Zinfandel "Geyserville" Late Picked

What a different world of zinfandel it was back in 1975- the Late Picked bottling from Geyserville weighed in at 14.7 percent in alcohol, or about the same as the current release of so many producer's "regular" bottling! This was still drinking beautifully at age thirty-six and showed no signs of imminent decline, as it offers up a very stylish nose of raspberries, cherries, coffee, a touch of caramel, lovely spice tones and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impressively focused, with melting tannins, a lovely core of fruit and very good grip on the long and classy finish. It is not particularly sweet these days, after more than thirty-five years of bottle age and retains just a nice glazing of residual sugar and the wine is an excellent partner with a cheese course. Good juice. 2011-2030+. **90.**

1974 Conn Creek Vineyards Zinfandel (Napa Valley)

It was the legendary 1974 cabernet sauvignon made from grapes purchased from the Eisele Vineyard that really put this winery on the map, but Bill and Cathy Collins' foundation for Conn Creek Vineyards was actually the fifty-four acre zinfandel vineyard, located in northern Napa Valley, that they purchased in 1968. The 1974 zinfandel from Conn Creek Vineyards was the first I had ever had a chance to taste from the Collins family, and the wine has aged quite nicely and continues to drink very well indeed. The quite complex bouquet offers up a stylish blend of black raspberries, menthol, chocolate, cigar smoke, dried spices, a nice touch of soil and a peppery topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and still very nicely balanced, with a good core, nice spice tones and a long, mature finish that closes with a note of coffee. This wine has probably been fully mature for at least twenty years, but shows no signs of slowing down in the immediate future and is quite a tasty old bottle of zinfandel. 2015-2030. **89.**

1974 Gemello Winery "Amador County" Zinfandel

The Gemello Winery was founded by John Gemello in the Santa Cruz Mountain region at the end of 1933, right after the repeal of prohibition. He had arrived in the region from Piemonte in 1913 and had started his California wine career working for Paul Masson. He was able to save enough to buy the property he would eventually build his winery on in 1925. His son Mario took

over as head of the family winery in 1944 and made wine here until his last vintage of 1978. The Gemello family mostly purchased grapes in Santa Cruz for their wines, but starting in 1970, they began to produce zinfandel from grapes in Amador County, after Bob Trinchero of Sutter Home introduced them to the region. Their 1974 Amador County zinfandel is still alive and kicking, with plenty of depth and muscle, as this was the style that they were looking for back in this era, “a good heavy zinfandel” as Mario Gemello liked to recall. The wine offers up a deep and brambly nose of dark berries, zinfandel spice tones, a fair bit of tariness, woodsmoke and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly four-square in personality, but with impressive depth at the core and still a bit of chewy tannin perking up the vigorous finish. This is a sturdy bottle that still has plenty of life ahead of it, but is not particularly complex or refined. Not bad. 2015-2035. **86.**

1974 Ridge Vineyards “Lytton Springs” Zinfandel (Dry Creek Valley)

The 1974 Lytton Springs zinfandel from Ridge is one of the greatest bottles of zinfandel I have ever had the pleasure to taste. The wine has aged brilliantly and is drinking still at its absolute peak, soaring from the glass in a complex and captivating nose of black raspberries, cherries, pipe tobacco, delicate spice tones, a dollop of meatiness, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of aged leather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and seamless, with excellent complexity, a fine core, outstanding focus and balance and a very long, meltingly tannic and utterly sophisticated finish. For those keeping score at home, the alcohol on this gem in the ripe vintage of 1974 was 13.3 percent. An utterly brilliant zin with decades of life still ahead of it! 2012-2035+. **94.**

1973 Mayacamas Vineyards Zinfandel

The 1973 Mayacamas zinfandel is a very heady bottle, with the wine tipping the scales at a “near-monster truck” fifteen percent alcohol. Surprisingly, the bouquet still remains quite fresh and intriguing at this altitude, offering up a very vibrant blend of cherries, dried red berries, a bit of menthol, smoke and a fair bit of chocolate sauce. However, on the palate this full-bodied wine no longer packs enough fruit to buffer the alcohol and the wine is decidedly “spirity” from the mid-palate back, with good depth and still a nice touch of tangy acidity, but not a whole lot of civility in terms of heat. It is an interesting wine to taste, which normally would have been listed as a “Late Harvest” zinfandel back in this era, for there remains a bit of residual sugar, even at this lofty octane. Intriguing, but not great. 2010-2020+. **83.**

1973 Ridge Vineyards “Geyserville” Zinfandel (Sonoma)

The 1973 Ridge Geyserville was pretty ripe by the standards of this era in California, coming in at 14.3 percent alcohol, and the wine has not aged as well as many other Ridge zinfandels from this epoch (though I should note that I had one excellent bottle of this wine back in 2010, so perhaps I have just been unlucky with the last couple of examples I have crossed paths with of this wine). The 1973 was one hundred percent from this varietal (many Geyservilles are a blend that is predominantly zinfandel, but also includes carignane and other grapes) and offers up a complex and brambly nose of raspberries, coffee, spice cake, hickory smoke and fallen oak leaves. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and complex, but also a bit four-square, with a good core, low acids, little remaining tannin and modest grip on the still pretty long finish. I had friends who were great Ridge aficionados back in the 1980s, whose experience dated back to the very earliest days with this winery, and they always insisted that the Ridge zinfandels that really aged the best were the ones that stayed around the thirteen percent alcohol level! The '73 Geyserville obviously would not have been one of their candidates for

long-term cellaring, and I suspect that this wine was far more impressive early on in its evolution. But, that said, it is still holding on nicely and is not dead yet. 2012-2020+? **86.**

1973 Joseph Swan Vineyards Zinfandel (Dry Creek Valley)

The 1973 vintage of Joseph Swan Vineyards zinfandel is one of the most famous wines that Joe Swan ever produced in his career and it continues to drink at a celestial level as it closes in on its fortieth birthday. The bouquet is flat out brilliant, as it soars from the glass in a refined and dignified blend of sweet berries, gentle notes of woodsmoke, a touch of cigar ash, elegant spice tones, orange zest, a myriad of autumnal soil tones and old Burgundy-like notes of cola. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and wonderfully complex, with fine mid-palate depth, exceptional focus and balance, just a whisper of its tannin, fine acids and stunning length and grip on the utterly complex and elegant finish. Old zinfandel does not get any better than this profound wine. 2011-2030. **97.**



1972 Mayacamas Vineyards “Late Harvest” Zinfandel

This was served double blind, so I did not get a chance to note how high the alcohol was on this bottling. The wine is fairly dry now (though not completely) and really offers up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, soil tones, a bit of orange peel, roses, spice tones and a bit of hay in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows just a touch of residual sweetness at this point in its evolution (though no doubt it was quite sweet at the outset),

with little tannin, nice focus and good length and grip on the decidedly tangy finish. This is still a very good bottle and it is a lot of fun to drink double blind. 2009-2025. **90.**

1972 Joseph Swan Vineyards Zinfandel “Lot One” (Dry Creek Valley)

There were two distinct bottlings of Swan zinfandel from the Teldeschi Vineyard in 1972, with one lot produced from grapes picked before the harvest rains, and the other produced from grapes gathered after the rains. Lot One was picked before the rains and tipped the scales at 13.7 percent in alcohol. The wine is a deep and beautiful bottle of old zinfandel, offer up a complex aromatic mélange of dried raspberries, woodsmoke, *garrigue*, orange peel, meaty tones and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and still impressively youthful in profile, with good acidity, still a bit of tannin and outstanding length and grip on the classy finish. Just a beautiful bottle of zinfandel that has decades of life still ahead of it and may yet improve a bit more with further bottle age! 2011-2035. **92+.**

1972 Joseph Swan Vineyards Zinfandel “Lot Two” (Dry Creek Valley)

The 1972 Lot Two zinfandel was produced from Teldeschi grapes harvested after the rains this year, and its alcohol level is correspondingly lower than the Lot One bottling, as it reached only thirteen percent. Much to my surprise, I actually had a distinct preference for the post-rain bottling in '72, as this wine showed no signs of any flavor diminution and was an extremely vibrant and elegant example of old zinfandel. The bouquet offers up a complex and very classy mix of brambly, dried fruit, coffee, lovely spice tones, a touch of meatiness, a complex base of soil and a fine topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with a suave attack and a touch finer detailing than the Lot One. The wine shows off outstanding mid-palate depth, great purity and superb length and grip on the wide open and absolutely *à point* finish. It is of course possible that the 1972 Lot Two zinfandel is simply at its absolute apogee, while the Lot One is still a tad on the young side and climbing in quality, but for the moment, I have to give a slight nod to Lot Two for its outstanding complexity and elegance. A great wine. 2011-2030. **94.**

1971 Russian River Vineyards Zinfandel (Forestville)

The 1971 Russian River Vineyards zinfandel tips the scales at an even twelve percent alcohol, which was probably par for the course in this cooler section of Sonoma County back in the early 1970s. This winery was founded in 1963 and is based in Forestville, which is where Joseph Swan Vineyards is also located. Not sure where they would have sourced the fruit for this 1971 zinfandel, as presumably it was not made from young vines. In any case, the wine is still quite vigorous and well-balanced, as it wafts from the glass in a fine old blend of black cherries, a touch of chicory, roasted meats, gentle notes of *garrigue*, sarsaparilla, charred wood, dried eucalyptus and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite tangy, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, pretty good complexity and still a bit of backend tannin on the long and impressively robust finish. This wine is not quite as complex on the palate as it is on the nose, but it has plenty of personality and is still at its apogee and provides no shortage of pleasure in a style that shows very good stuffing and is certainly not rustic. Good, old-fashioned California juice. 2015-2030. **88.**

Joseph Swan Vineyards Zinfandel “Lot Z” (A Blend of 1971 and 1969)

The non-vintage “Lot Z” zinfandel is a blend of wines from the 1969 and 1971 vintages—both of course from the Teldeschi Vineyard. This is a slightly riper style of zinfandel than the titans from vintages such as 1973 or 1972, but offers up a lovely, mature bouquet of plums, chocolate, cigar ash, a touch of road tar, pepper, *garrigue* and new leather. On the palate the

wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a plush core of fruit, still lovely freshness to its fruit component and impressive length and grip on the still quite tangy and perfectly balanced finish. Tasting all of these old Swan zinfandels makes it pretty easy to understand why Joe Swan was considered the wizard of zinfandel in his day. Lovely wine. 2011-2025. **90.**

1971 Joseph Swan Vineyards Zinfandel (Dry Creek Valley)

While I had tasted the “Lot Z” blended bottling of zinfandel from Joe Swan previously, which hailed from a mix of 1969 and 1971 juice, this was the first time I had ever tasted the straight 1971 vintage bottling from grapes Joe had purchased from Teldeschi Vineyard. The wine is absolutely outstanding and still at its apogee, as it jumps from the glass in a deep and complex constellation of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, dried eucalyptus, chicory and a lovely topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely *à point*, with a fine core, melted tannins, good acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and still very vibrant finish. Joe Swan initially made his reputation on the strength of his superb zinfandels, and tasting this timeless 1971, it is very easy to see why this was so! 2015-2030+. **93.**

1970 Trentadue Winery Zinfandel (Geyserville)

This most likely hails from the old, 1882 vines in the Trentadue family’s vineyard that are the source of the Ridge “Geyserville” bottling, as Paul Draper recalls that Ridge was not buying all the fruit off of the ranch back in 1970. The wine has aged beautifully, as it is only thirteen percent octane, and offers up a pure, vibrant and nicely spicy nose of baked cherries and red plums, cloves, allspice, a nice touch of meatiness, lovely soil tones, sage, a bit of cedar and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, transparent and nicely tangy, with a good core, lovely balance and complexity and fine length and grip on the fully mature finish. The tannins have all fallen away on the backend here, but the good acidity has kept the fruit component quite fresh and the wine holds up nicely when opened. I imagine it has drunk much the same for the last fifteen or twenty years, but I see no reason this wine cannot continue to cruise along at this level for quite some time still, as it remains very well-balanced. A very tasty old zin. 2015-2025+. **89.**

1969 Joseph Swan Vineyards Zinfandel “Lot Two” (Dry Creek Valley)

The 1969 Lot Two zinfandel from Joseph Swan, from the first vintage where he used fruit from the Teldeschi Vineyard, is an utterly brilliant bottle of zinfandel at its zenith of peak drinkability. There were two different bottlings of zinfandel in 1969, as Joe needed to free up some barrel space in the cellar and bottled up the Lot One ahead of the harvest in 1970. The Lot Two was bottled a few months later, but is essentially the same wine as the Lot One- with the exception of the date of bottling. The stunning nose is very deep and mature, as it soars from the glass in a beautiful blend of chocolate, woodsmoke, dried, dark berries, autumnal soil tones, a nice touch of venison and a really captivating topnote of fresh sage. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and velvety, with excellent mid-palate depth, flawless balance, bright acids and absolutely stellar length and grip on the poised and dancing finish. This is an absolutely beautiful, elegant old zinfandel that shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. Great juice. 2011-2030+. **94.**

1935 Simi Zinfandel (served from half bottle!)

This is one of the most amazing bottles of wine that I have ever had the pleasure to taste, as I find it utterly incomprehensible how a seventy-two year-old half bottle of zinfandel could still be drinking so well, but this wine was quite delicious, and not merely an historical curiosity. No doubt one of the keys to this wine's amazing longevity was low alcohol (under thirteen percent I would guess- it was not marked on the label), as in my experience zinfandel at reasonable alcohol levels is actually quite an ageworthy wine. The lovely old nose on the '35 Simi Zinfandel is a mélange of dried red berries, coffee, pink peppercorns, leather and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and still quite sweet at the core, with lovely freshness and complexity, and impressive length on the velvety finish. Obviously at this age there is no more tannin remaining, and the acids are on the low side, but the balance is sufficient here to continue to carry this wine along for several more years. Rather an eye-opening experience. 2007-2020+? **88.**

**THE ANNUAL LOIRE VALLEY REPORT
VINTAGES 2014, 2013 AND A BEVY OF OLDER BOTTLES;
INCLUDING DOMAINE PROFILES ON COULÉE DE SERRANT,
MOULIN TOUCHAIS AND DOMAINE YANNICK AMIRAULT**



As I noted a year ago, it has been a very difficult run 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. Happily, the summer of 2014 proved far easier for growers in the region and the Loire Valley has had its first truly fine vintage since 2010, which is welcome news to both producers and wine lovers. It is not that the three previous vintages did not include a very large number of impressively successful wines, but it has been such a pleasure to sit down and taste through a large range of beautifully ripe and complete wines across the entire spectrum of appellations in this long and beautiful section of France. A number of top bottlings from producers that are typically given a longer *elevage* prior to release in the market are still in the 2013 vintage at the present time, and to contrast a *vigneron's* more basic bottlings from 2014 alongside their top, old vine or reserve cuvées fully underscores just how dramatically superior the 2014 vintage is in the Loire Valley from its three predecessors. This is not to say that there are not some stellar 2013s- witness

Pierre-Marie Luneau's gorgeous Muscadet "Terre de Pierre" to cite just one example- but there is a vivacity and exuberance to the ripe and pure fruit of 2014 that really stands out after the last three growing seasons in the Loire.

The 2014 growing season in the Loire Valley hit the ground running in the spring, with warm weather that carried right through to flowering, so that crop loads were likely to be back to normal levels, after the very short yields of 2013. There were no spring frosts in 2014, so vines were able to recover nicely from the difficulties of the past three seasons. With early June weather sunny and breezy, the *floraison* was flawless and there was plenty of sun and warm temperatures in the months of June and July of 2014, with some interspersed rains, but none of the hail damage that wreaked such havoc on Vouvray in June of 2013. In general, it was a very uneventful and promising first couple of months of the summer, with fruit maturing nicely and hopes starting to rebound at domaines after the catastrophically short crops of the last few years and the very difficult growing seasons. August was cool and grey, which put a damper on expectations for a great vintage, but September arrived with absolutely beautiful weather, and this Indian Summer was able to make up for the sluggish ripening in August and most producers were able to start picking towards the back half of September with very good quality grapes and nice sugar levels. Growers were surprised though to find that when they started picking, yields were not quite as generous as they had hoped, which probably has added a touch more concentration to the finished wines, but the empty cellars at so many domaines could have used another five or ten hectoliters per hectare in 2014!

There was a bit of hail in parts of Chinon on September 19th (in Cravant-les-Coteaux and Sazilly, where Domaine Charles Joguet is located), which was an unnecessary flashback to 2013's unsettled summer, but reports are that the damaged berries for the most part dried up over the subsequent week or two of sunny weather and fell off of the vines prior to picking. For traditional later harvesters in the central Loire, the very end of September and early October were a bit more problematic in terms of rain, and one had to dodge around wet weather if the grapes were still out on the vines by the first week of October. This is of course a bit less of a problem with red varieties than white, but 2014 seems unlikely to provide a large number of late harvest chenin blanc wines, as the autumn rains came a bit earlier than what would have been ideal for those wines and growers were faced with bringing in ripe grapes as the rains were forecast (often with the first starts of botrytis) or face the chance that wet and warm weather would quickly turn the noble rot to less noble forms of fungus. Vouvray's bigger challenge in 2014 was the variations on yields from vine to vine, as the plants struggled to recover from the catastrophic pummeling by hail the year before, so vines with a lot of bunches tended to not ripen their crop loads as thoroughly as those with less berries. But, at the very least, 2014 provided very good conditions for producing Sec and Demi-Sec bottlings in both Vouvray and Montlouis, and there are tiny quantities of Moelleux also in some cellars from early *tries* through the vineyards to select some botrytized berries.

The biggest problem in Vouvray in 2014 is the growers and INAO blocking the use of the appellation for two of the finest growers based in Montlouis, François Chidaine and Jacky Blot, who happen to also own prized vineyards in Vouvray. For decades, there has been a dispensation in the regulations to allow these producers to pick their Vouvray fruit and take them back to their cellars in Montlouis to make and raise their wines, but in 2014, the tacit understanding unraveled

(for what reason I have no idea) and politics has stepped in and blocked both of these producers from using the Vouvray appellation for their labeling of their 2014s. As of this writing, the argument has wound its way into the courts, where it is expected that eventually, both Messieurs Chidaine and Blot will be allowed to label their 2014s as Vouvray (from what I understand, the Vouvray growers association is really off base here in legal terms) once the courts have heard the case, but the dispute has blocked both of these domaines from releasing their Vouvrais as of yet from their cellars, as they are currently faced with the prospects of selling them as *Vin de Table* or holding them in the cellars until the court case is settled. Sheer stupidity. So notes on the Clos Baudoin 2014 in this report!

The other challenging issue across the region in general is the prevalence of the Asian fruit fly in the vineyards in 2014, as this insect is able to penetrate the grape skins while the bunches are still hanging on the vine, and this causes *vignerons* to have to try and hand sort out these affected berries, as they will have volatile acidity and add vinegar elements in the finished wines if not sorted out. Normal European fruit flies cannot damage the skins and get into the interior of the grapes, so they have never been more than an amusing nuisance, but the Asian variety is not a welcome new arrival in the area. One really wonders how this is going to affect machine harvesters, as they often use mechanical sorters of some sort as well, as it is hard to imagine how they will be able to exercise the same precision in getting affected berries and their vinegary juice out of the baskets and not allow them into the vats. I keep hearing that machine harvesters are better and better, and do not really know enough about them to understand if they will be able to as effectively identify damaged berries by the Asian fruit flies. But, after all of the challenges that Mother Nature through at *vignerons* throughout the Loire from 2011 through 2013, the Asian fruit flies and their damage, are certainly a bit less damaging than horrific hail storms or widespread spring frosts.

So, what is the style of the 2014s in the Loire Valley? Pretty much across the board, from Muscadet in the west all the way to Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé in the east, the 2014s have excellent depth of fruit, impressive purity and very good structural bounce. Another fortnight of perfect weather to start out the month of October would have given us a legendary vintage, but even with the arrival of autumn rains in early October, the overall quality of the 2014s in this beautiful region are exemplary and there is an abundance of riches to choose from across the wide spectrum of wine styles and grape varieties. There will not be as much sweet wine as in years like 2005 or 2009, but other than the paucity of options in this category, the 2014 vintage in the Loire is bountiful and the wines have great depth and purity of fruit to go along with loads of personality. Most will drink well right from the outset and the earlier arrivals are in the market now and offer up tons of drinking pleasure. Acid levels are quite good, though the wines generally are quite open and not buttoned up behind their acids, so the wines have bounce and freshness, without the need to defer gratification for any extended period to let the wines blossom. The reds that I have had a chance to taste thus far, and most of the bigger cuvées of 2014 are not yet out in the market, have some nice ripe tannins, but again, are often quite approachable at this early stage and offer up really superb aromatic and flavor complexity. In short, 2014 is really a very, very good vintage from coast to coast in the Loire Valley and there are tons and tons of great wines currently in the market and more on their way in the months to come.

I should take a moment to discuss a bit the evolving phenomenon of the “natural wine movement” in the Loire Valley, as this is certainly one of the epicenters of this winemaking philosophy in the world of wine and emerging trends in this camp seem to take root here first. While I am a huge fan of organic or biodynamic viticulture and producing wines as naturally as possible in the cellars after the harvest, one should also note that there is clearly a growing number of rather unstable, frazzled “natural wines” on the market these days (or at least crossing my path with more frequency), and it seems to me that it is important to keep in mind that one should not let the philosophical foundations of one’s approach to winemaking take precedence over the practicalities of putting stable and clean wines in the bottle for customers. I am not sure if winegrowers in this camp are pushing the envelope more as the natural wine phenomenon has a growing and stable legion of fans (particularly amongst *cavistes* and *sommeliers* in both Paris and New York), but I hit a larger number of unstable wines in preparation for this report than I can recall in many years. Many of these were plagued by overt volatile acidity and perhaps this is more a reflection of the influx of the Asian fruit fly in the region, rather than *laissez-faire* cellar techniques amongst producers, but even with my high tolerance for VA in my wines, I found several that were too volatile for my palate. There were also a number of low alcohol wines that seemed more a reflection of winegrower preference for low octane, rather than attributable to the vagaries of the vintage, and I have a hard time understanding a 2014 vintage wine that is 11.5 percent alcohol, as it seems pretty clear that the opportunity was there to get the grapes a bit riper and provide just a bit more *gras* in the mid-palate than some of these rather sinewy wines showed. My impression, right or wrong, was that wines of this ilk are a reflection of the victory of theory over reality, to the detriment of the overall quality of the wine. I just worry that Nicolas Joly’s rather extreme mantra that he wants “a true wine, rather than a good wine” is starting to become too prevalent in today’s natural wine circles. While unstable or malnourished natural wines were certainly not the majority of what I tasted from this camp, they seemed to be a growing percentage of the natural wines I tasted this time around and I hope that this was just a statistically insignificant small sampling, rather than the reflection of a growing trend. I just hope that all of the things that are so good and vitally important about this movement do not get lost by excessive theory in the years to come.

As has been the case for several years now, this report is organized geographically, from west to east, running from Muscadet on the Atlantic coast all the way east to the appellations of Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé. Within each regional subsection, wines are grouped first by vintage, from youngest to oldest, and then by producer. However, continuing the tenth anniversary series of additional domaine profiles in each issue, this report on the Loire Valley includes three separate domaine features as well: Moulin Touchais, Coulée de Serrant and Domaine Yannick Amirault’s fine Bourgueil domaine. Each of these estate profiles is included in the general report, appearing ahead of their respective sections on their geographical home region.

Loire Valley Sparkling Wines

Domaine Baumard “Carte Turquoise” Crémant de Loire Brut NV

The Domaine Baumard “Carte Turquoise” Crémant de Loire non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of chenin blanc and cabernet franc. The current release offers up a bright and inviting nose of apple, a touch of quince, chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and focused, with zesty acids, pinpoint bubbles and fairly

good length and grip on the finish. The *dosage* here is fairly generous, but the wine is nicely balanced and quite easy to drink, despite a fair bit of sweetness. 2015-2020. **87.**

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

The current release of Les Maisons Bullées Rosé is made from one hundred percent gamay (grown in *argilo-calcaire* soils) and hails from the 2014 vintage. The *vin clair* spends ten months aging in older cask prior to bottling and offers up a vibrant nose of blood orange, rose petals, a nice base of soil and a bit of candied orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and bone dry, with lovely focus and balance, frothy *mousse* and just a whisper of acetic acid poking out on the long and complex finish. This is very easy to drink. 2015-2017. **88.**

Pépie Bulles Vin Mousseux- Domaine de la Pépière

The Pépie Bulles Vin Mousseux from Rémi Branger and Marc Ollivier is made entirely from Melon de Bourgogne (the grape of Muscadet) and bottled with enough *dosage* to nicely buffer the racier aspects of this varietal. The current release is quite tasty, offering up a deep and fairly complex nose of bread fruit, wet stones, dried flowers, salty elements and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and frothy, with lovely focus and grip, fine balance and a long, complex and tasty finish. This is high class Muscadet with bubbles, which is really a very appealing combination. 2015-2020+. **90.**

Perle Sauvage Pétillant Naturel Extra Brut- Marc Plouzeau

The Perle Sauvage Pétillant Naturel Extra Brut from Marc Plouzeau is made from one hundred percent cabernet franc and is aged twelve months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and release. The bouquet is deep, complex and exotic in its mélange of baked apples, peach, a nice touch of soil and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with quite fine *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a long, wide open and vibrant finish. This is really delicious and would go great with roast turkey! 2015-2018. **89.**

Perle Sauvage Rosé Pétillant Naturel Extra Brut- Marc Plouzeau

Marc Plouzeau's Perle Sauvage sparkling Rosé is also made entirely from cabernet franc and spends nine months aging on its fine lees. The wine is a lovely deep salmon color and offers up a quite vinous nose of red berries, a touch of blood orange, warm bread and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and broad-shouldered, with a rock solid core, frothy *mousse*, brisk acids and a long, slightly four-square finish. The regular bottling of Perle Sauvage is more elegant an interpretation, but this has stuffing and personality. Not bad at all. 2015-2018. **86.**

Perles Fines Rosé Pétillant Brut- Marc Plouzeau

Marc Plouzeau's "Perles Fines" Rosé Pétillant is a lovely wine, showing more elegance on the nose and palate than the "Perle Sauvage" version. The bouquet shows lovely cabernet franc character in its mix of white cherries, a touch of tangerine, currant leaf, lovely soil tones and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very nicely balanced, with frothy *mousse*, a good core and nice length and grip on the vibrant finish. A tasty bottle of sparkling cabernet franc, with plenty of elegance. 2015-2018. **88.**

La Taille aux Loups "Triple Zéro" Montlouis Pétillant (Jacky Blot)

Jacky Blot's La Taille aux Loups "Triple Zéro" Montlouis Pétillant is a very tasty, chenin blanc-based sparkler that is *non-dosé* and quite bone dry, but with very good balance. The complex bouquet offers up a youthful blend of quince, chalky soil tones, a touch of smokiness, wet wool and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very nicely knit

together, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is approachable today, but also seems poised to age well in the bottle as well and I would be inclined to cellar it for a couple of years and allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. 2015-2025. **87+**.



Muscadet

2014 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “les Dabinières”- Jean-Jacques et Rémi Bonnet

The Muscadet “les Dabinières” from Jean-Jacques et Rémi Bonnet hails from a vineyard planted on mica-schist and gneiss that is farmed biodynamically and of course harvested by hand. Their 2014 Dabinières offers up a fine nose of apple, bread fruit, salty ocean breezes, a fine base of minerality, dried flowers and gentle leesy tones. On the palate the wine is bright, vibrant, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great cut and mineral drive, fine complexity and a very long, perfectly focused and racy finish. What a dramatic difference from the laid back structural personality of the 2013 version! 2015-2030+. **92.**

2014 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “les Levraudière”- Bonnet-Huteau

The 2014 les Levraudière from Bonnet-Huteau is a really lovely bottle of Muscadet, with the depth and generosity of the vintage nicely coupled to a fine spine of briny minerality. The first class nose delivers a deep and complex blend of lemon, a bit of tart peach, beautiful leesiness, a touch of fresh almond, wet stones and ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with excellent soil signature, bright acids,

excellent focus and grip and a very long, complex and classic finish. This is very high class Muscadet and a terrific value! 2015-2025+. **92.**

2014 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “Classic”- Domaine de l’Écu

The “Classic” bottling from Domaine de l’Écu is produced from the youngest vines on the estate, but with the wine handled the same way as the older vine cuvées, with hand-picking, indigenous yeast fermentations and the wine spending more than ten months aging on its fine lees prior to bottling. The 2014 “Classic” is a lovely bottle of Muscadet, offering up a bright and wide open nose of green apple, bread fruit, stony soil tones and a nice topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and succulent, with a good core, fine framing acids and lovely length and grip on the stylish finish. Good juice for near-term drinking. 2015-2020. **88.**

2014 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “Gneiss”- Domaine de l’Écu

The 2014 Gneiss bottling from Domaine de l’Écu is an excellent example of the vintage, but the estate had to shorten the customary aging on the lees for its top cuvées in 2014 from fifteen months down to twelve, as they simply had no wine to offer clients! The wine is produced from forty-five to fifty-five year-old vines and delivers a superb bouquet of pear, a refined note of sea salts, a beautifully complex base of soil, a touch of leesiness and a gentle floral note redolent of lilacs. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, crisp and quite a bit more primary in profile than the nose suggests, with a fine core, nascent complexity and excellent bounce on the long and focused finish. A lovely bottle in the making. 2015-2025+. **92.**

2014 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “Orthogneiss”- Domaine de l’Écu

The 2014 Orthogneiss cuvée from Domaine de l’Écu is superb on both the nose and palate, wafting from the glass in a pure and complex constellation of lemon, bread fruit, gentle maritime scents, spring flowers and a very complex base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and vibrant, with a lovely core, great focus and grip and a very long, youthful and utterly seamless finish. This will gain more complexity with a bit of bottle age, but it is so beautifully balanced that it is going to be hard to resist it right from the start. 2015-2030+. **93.**

2014 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “Granite”- Domaine de l’Écu

The 2014 Domaine de l’Écu “Granite” bottling of Muscadet is their finest of the range in this vintage, with a more tightly-knit personality out of the blocks, but also just a touch more depth and length than the Gneiss and Orthogneiss cuvées. The outstanding bouquet offers up scents of lemon zest, wet stones, gentle smokiness, just a touch of the lees, dried flowers and a bit of ocean breeze in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a lovey core in reserve, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the poised and zesty finish. Fine, fine juice. 2015-2030+. **93+.**

2014 Muscadet-sur-Lie Côtes de Grandlieu- Dom. Haut Bourg (Hervé et Nicolas Choblet)

The 2014 Muscadet from Hervé et Nicolas Choblet offers up the bright and generous fruit of the vintage, coupled to a good base of soil and nice cut and grip on the backend. The bouquet is a blend of lemon, bread fruit, salty soil tones and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nicely balanced, with a good core, bright acids and a long, focused and properly soil-driven finish. Good value. 2015-2020. **88.**

2014 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine- Domaine de la Pépière

If there is a better French white wine value out there than the “regular bottling of Muscadet from Domaine de la Pépière, I would like to taste it! The 2014 version is excellent, delivering a bright and wide open bouquet of lemon, green apple, salty ocean air, a touch of hay

from its lees aging and lovely minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and extremely generous at the core, with lovely focus and grip, bright acids and superb bounce and complexity on the long finish. In top vintages like 2014, this bottling has always offered as much flavor intensity as one can find for the price! 2015-2025. **90+**.

2014 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Clos des Briords” V.V.- Dom. de la Pépière

The 2014 Clos des Briords from Domaine de la Pépière is outstanding, offering up excellent depth, soil signature and purity. The top flight bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of lemon, lime, a touch of pear, salty ocean air, wet stones and incipient notes of lemongrass and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and vibrant, with a superb core of fruit, lovely focus and grip, bright acids and seamless balance on the long, youthful and very classy finish. Just a classic vintage of Clos des Briords in the making that should age gracefully for the next twenty years. 2015-2035. **93**.

2014 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “Les Gras Moutons” - Domaine de la Pépière

The 2014 Las Gras Moutons from Domaine de la Pépière is a young and very promising bottle of Muscadet, but like so many of the single vineyard bottlings from Marc Ollivier and Rémi Branger these days, this wine will be even better with a few years' worth of bottle age. The deep, pure and very fresh nose offers up a constellation of green apple, salty ocean breeze notes, really refined leesiness, straw and a beautifully complex base of minerally soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with superb backend grip, perfectly integrated acids and outstanding balance on the very long finish. This is very, very easy to drink now, but there are more layers here to unfold and it will not really blossom until it has seen at least a few years in the cellar. A really excellent bottle of Muscadet. 2015-2035. **93+**.

2014 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Dom. Pierre de la Grange” V.V.- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The 2014 Pierre de la Grange from Domaine Luneau-Papin is another outstanding example of this fine vintage, wafting from the glass in a bright and briny blend of tart pear, refined leesiness, dried flowers, plenty of smokiness, complex soil tones and a bit of seashore in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp, and just a touch more reserved in personality out of the blocks than the Clos des Allées, with a fine girdle of acidity, excellent balance and a long, focused and still gently primary finish. This is already very tasty to drink now, but another year in the cellar will allow it to more fully blossom. I love the sense of reserve on the backend today! 2016-2030+. **92**.

2014 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Clos des Allées” V.V.- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The 2014 version of the monopole of Clos des Allées is from Pierre-Marie Luneau is simply stunning, offering up the depth and ripe fruit at the core of a top flight vintage. The bouquet delivers a bottomless blend of breadfruit, *fleur de sel*, spring flowers, almost sweet leesy tones, raw almond, salty soil tones and a gentle topnote of ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a long, bright and zesty finish. A beautiful wine- though I do miss that old, unique, green metallic label for this bottling! 2015-2030. **92**.

2013 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Le L d’Or”- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The 2013 Cuvée Le L d’Or” from Pierre-Marie Luneau is bit more deeply-pitched in this vintage than in most, but the wine is also showing lovely secondary layers of complexity from its more advanced profile and is drinking very well indeed today. The nose offers up scents of briny ocean air, baked quince, refined leesy tones, a touch of nuttiness and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely racy, with a good core, fine soil signature, crisp acids

and fine complexity on the long and wide open finish. In most vintages, the Le L d'Or is still a very young wine at two years of age, but my gut feeling is that in the rainy 2013 vintage, this wine is probably going to mature at a fairly brisk pace and I would plan on drinking this wine in the next four or five years. However, over that time frame, it is going to be a very tasty bottle. 2015-2020. **91.**

2013 Muscadet-sur-Lie S. et M. “Terre de Pierre”- Domaine Luneau-Papin

The volcanic soils of the Terre de Pierre date back five hundred million years and are quite unique in the Muscadet region. The Luneau family ages this wine for twelve months on its fine lees and eight months in older casks prior to bottling. The 2013 Terre de Pierre is excellent and one of the top Muscadet bottlings I have tasted from this vintage, delivering a bright and complex bouquet of bread fruit, refined minerality, a touch of citrus peel, lovely leesy complexity, a touch of smokiness and a gentle saline topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and superbly focused, with impressive cut and vibrancy for a 2013, an excellent core and lovely complexity on the long, youthful and perfectly balanced finish. Really an exceptional bottle of 2013 Muscadet. 2015-2025+. **93.**

2012 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “Sur Lies”- La Louvetrie (Jo Landron)

The 2012 Muscadet from Jo Landron is fully mature and drinking quite nicely today, offering up a deep nose of bread fruit, leesy tones, a bit of smokiness, a fine base of soil and a touch of straw in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish and fairly complex, with a slightly deep-pitched personality (from the vintage), a good core, fine focus and good, sound framing acids to keep the wine bouncy on the long finish. This does not have the vibrancy of a vintage like 2014, but there is depth and complexity here and the wine is drinking very well today. 2015-2018. **88.**

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

It is almost like Christmas when one opens a box of Muscadet samples and sees another bottle of 2010 Excelsior from Pierre-Marie Luneau! The Excelsior cuvée hails from seventy-five year-old vines originally planted from *selection massale* cuttings. The 2010 last year was absolutely stellar, but still on the young side, and one year down the road the wine is starting to blossom beautifully and really drink with generous distinction. The pure and complex bouquet provides a superb blend of lemon, that marvelously complex base of leesy tones, bread fruit, developing notes of smokiness, a lovely base of saline minerality, dried flowers and a gently briny topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and perfectly balanced, with a rock solid core of fruit, great mineral drive, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, bright and zesty finish. The complexity here is building superbly with bottle age and this wine is really starting to drink with great class, but will probably continue to improve for the next several years. 2015- 2035+. **95.**

2010 Muscadet-sur-Lie-de-Sèvre-et-Maine “4”- Domaine de la Pépière

The 2010 Muscadet “4” bottling from Marc Ollivier and Rémi Branger’s Domaine de la Pépière takes its name from the four years that it has spent aging on its lees prior to its preparation for release from the cellars. The wine is outstanding in 2010, offering up a deep and complex nose that shows lovely secondary layers of complexity in its aromatic blend of discreet peach, plenty of smokiness, sweet leesy tones, a bit of hazelnut, salty soil tones and just a touch of granite. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully focused, with a superb core, great balance and a very long, still quite vibrant and beautifully evolved finish. This

wine is now drinking at its apogee, but with the potential to still cruise along for many, many years to come. 2015-2030+. **94.**

2005 Muscadet-sur-Lie Côtes de Grandlieu “Origine Haut Bourg”- Domaine Haut Bourg

The 2005 Origine Haut Bourg is a new release from the Choblet family, having been aged on its fine lees for more than nine years prior to release. The wine offers up a superb and complex nose of bread fruit, sweet nuttiness from the lees aging, stony minerality, dried flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still zesty with acidity, with a superb core of fruit, lovely complexity and a long, focused and very vibrant finish. A lovely bottle of Muscadet from a top flight vintage that is at its absolute summit of peak drinkability today. 2015-2025. **93.**

Muscadet Rouge Bottlings

2014 Cabernet Franc- La Pépière (Marc Ollivier)

The 2014 La Pépière Cabernet Franc tips the scales at a svelte twelve percent alcohol, but shows no shortage of ripeness and is a really lovely, high-toned example of this lovely varietal. The bouquet is a complex and classy mélange of sweet dark berries, a touch of tobacco leaf, stony soil, tree bark, cola and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, pure, complex and intensely flavored, with lovely focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, vibrant and tangy finish. This wine is beautifully light on its feet and yet long and intense, and is a great example of depth without weight. Excellent juice and one of the best young red wines I have tasted from Monsieur Ollivier. 2015-2025. **91.**

2014 Côt- La Pépière (Marc Ollivier)

The 2014 Côt from La Pépière also weighs in at an even twelve percent alcohol and the wine is every bit as fine as the cabernet franc bottling. The bouquet is deep, pure and very expressive in its blend of cassis, black cherries, dark soil tones, a touch of bitter chocolate, charred wood and very discreet botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, complex and tangy, with a good core, a bit of backend tannin and fine focus on the long and very well-balanced finish. Another really lovely wine. 2015-2025. **90+.**

Anjou Blanc

2014 Le Berceau des Fées- Tessa Laroche

The 2014 Le Berceau des Fées from Tessa Laroche, the proprietress of Savennières’ Domaine aux Moines, is made from young vine chenin blanc, some of which is located within the Savennières appellation and some which lies just outside the boundaries, hence the Vin de France appellation for this wine. The wine offers up impressive depth on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, quince, chalk dusty soil tones, lanolin and a touch of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a rock solid core, excellent soil signature, fine focus and grip and a very long, impressive finish. A fine Savennières lookalike and a terrific value. 2015-2020+. **89+.**

2014 Magic of Ju-Ju- Agnès et René Mosse

The 2014 Magic of Ju-Ju bottling from Agnès et René Mosse is a lovely bottle of Anjou Blanc, no matter what *les officials* at the INAO might say about the wine. The wine comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a classic chenin blanc aromatic blend of quince, tangerine, chalky minerality, lanolin and a gentle topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is

medium-full, crisp and beautifully transparent, with a lovely core, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and classy finish. Fine juice. 2015-2030. **89+**.

2013 Anjou Blanc “Terre de Grès”- Château de Bois-Brinçon (Xavier Cailleau)

The Château de Bois-Brinçon is owned by Xavier and Géraldine Cailleau, who farm all of their vineyards biodynamically. Their 2013 Terre de Grès Blanc offers up a fine, youthful chenin blanc nose of quince, lemon, lanolin, deep soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite tightly-knit, with a rock solid core, brisk acids and impressive length and grip on the youthful finish. This is young and with plenty of cut from the vintage, but it has an electric backend and is really a very, very impressive young wine. It is approachable today, but will be even better with a couple of years in the cellar to blossom a bit from behind these snappy acids. A fine, fine result in 2013 and an excellent value. 2017-2030. **90.**

2013 Anjou Blanc “Le Clos des Rouliers”- Domaine Richard Leroy

The 2013 Clos des Rouliers from Richard Leroy is still a very young wine and quite reductive when first opened, so one must absolutely decant it if wanting to drink it now. With an hour in decanter the wine starts to stir and offers up a deep and still very primary nose of apple, quince, reductive notes of iodine, chalky soil, lanolin and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very tightly-knit, with the reduction never quite blowing off, but with a good core, brisk acids and a long, snappy finish. I love Richard Leroy’s wines and am very much inclined to give them the benefit of the doubt, but I am really not sure if the 2013 Clos des Rouliers will ever fully shake its reductive side. There is great stuffing and soil signature here, not to mention stunning length, but I cannot understand why it was bottled in such a reductive stage. 2020-2040? **87-92?**

2013 Anjou Blanc “Les Noëls de Montbenault”- Domaine Richard Leroy

The 2013 Anjou Blanc “Les Noëls de Montbenault” from Monsieur Leroy is also a bit reductive, but nowhere as dramatically so as the Clos des Rouliers, and this wine can be enjoyed with a bit of swirling in the glass, rather than requiring decanting. Once the wine blossoms, it offers up a deep and very complex nose of fresh pineapple, quince, a touch of iodine, lanolin, a fine base of limestone-infused soils, gentle notes of citrus blossoms and bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and racy, with a good core, excellent balance and grip, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and very focused finish. If Jean-François Coche had made wines from chenin blanc, they would have tasted like this! 2015-2030+. **92.**

2013 Les Bonnes Blanches- Agnès et René Mosse

The 2013 Les Bonnes Blanches from Agnès et René Mosse shows some of the deeper-pitched aromatics so typical of this vintage, but also plenty of complexity and depth as well. The bouquet is a wide open blend of orange, pineapple, a sound base of soil, wet wool, a touch of honeycomb and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and drinking beautifully, with a fine core, sound framing acids and very good length and grip on the complex, mature and slightly wooly finish. This is not a great vintage by any stretch of the imagination, but the Mosse family has produced a very tasty wine for drinking over the next few years that transcends the vintage. Good juice. 2015-2018. **88.**

2012 Anjou Blanc “Litus”- Eric Morgat

The 2012 Anjou Blanc “Litus” from Eric Morgat, which is barrel-fermented, like all of his wines, shows just a touch of vanilla in its aromatic constellation of quince, tangerine, chalky soil tones, a bit of bee pollen, white flowers and that dollop of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, primary and impressively powerful in personality for the 2012 vintage, with a superb core, brisk acids, fine focus and a very long, soil-driven and nascently complex finish. Truly exceptional young Anjou Blanc for such a vintage as 2012! 2016-2035. **92.**

2007 Anjou Blanc “La Lune”- Marc Angelli

I have liked a lot of Marc Angelli’s wines in the past, but I had a hard time really warming up to the rather chunky and blunt-edged style of his 1997 La Lune. The grapes for this bottling mostly hail from vineyards that lie within the appellation of Bonnezeaux, so I suppose I should be thankful they do not end up in one of those overly-chapitalized, cheap interpretations of sweet jug wine that proliferate under that label. In any case, this is a ripe wine that is best today on the nose, which wafts from the glass in a developed blend of baked quince, orange, fruit skin, soil and a hint of new leather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and four-square, with a good core, but some overt heat on the backend and a blunt finish that shows no nuance or complexity at the present time. Have those qualities disappeared, been temporarily submerged or were they non-existent from the start? The wine certainly still has plenty of life to it and perhaps it will be more enjoyable with further bottle age. Perhaps. 2015-2030+? **83-87+?**

Anjou Rouge

2012 Anjou-Villages Rouge “le Clos des Cosses”- Château de Bois-Brinçon

The Château de Bois-Brinçon is owned by Xavier and Géraldine Cailleau, who farm all of their vineyards via biodynamic principals and also raise cattle on their domaine as part of a mixed farming base to help create a harmonious ecological relationship with the earth. Their “le Clos des Cosses” *rouge* hails from a one hectare vineyard that was planted to cabernet franc and cabernet sauvignon in 1999 and has always been farmed biodynamically. The 2012 offers up a fine nose of cassis, cigar smoke, a bit of tree bark, lovely soil tones and a bit of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and black fruity, with fine intensity of flavor, modest tannins and fine length and grip on the focused finish. This is only eleven percent octane and is correspondingly light on its feet, but shows plenty of amplitude on the palate. A fine middleweight. 2015-2023. **88.**

2012 Anjou-Villages Rouge “la Seigneurie”- Château de Bois-Brinçon

The la Seigneurie bottling from the Xavier Cailleau hails from a three hectare vineyard of thirty-five year-old cabernet franc vines, with the soils here the classic *tuffeau* of the central Loire, as opposed to the marl and fossilized crustaceans found in the Clos des Cosses. This wine is a bit riper in the 2012 vintage, coming in at an even twelve percent and is a young wine that needs a bit of aeration when first opened to allow a touch of reduction to blow off, but eventually a quite complex bouquet of dark berries, saddle leather, tree bark, dark soil tones, espresso and cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very well-balanced, with fine core, moderate tannins, lovely soil signature and impressive grip and focus on the long and youthfully complex finish. This is really a very impressive middleweight and a fine value, but do decant it for a good fifteen to twenty minutes prior to serving, to allow the wine to open up properly. 2015-2025+. **90.**

2011 Anjou-Villages Rouge- Domaine du Closel

This is the first red wine I have ever had the pleasure to taste from the fine Savennières estate of Domaine du Closel. The wine is produced entirely from cabernet franc, which is planted at the foot of one of the hillside vineyards in Savennières and the 2011 is impressively ripe for this difficult vintage, coming in at a full thirteen percent alcohol. The nose delivers a fine mix of dark berries, cassis, tree bark, cigar wrapper and incipient notes of forest floor. On the palate the wine is medium-full, nascently complex and quite chewy on the backend, with a perfectly respectable core, fine focus and a long, youthful finish. This has good stuffing and balance and should prove to be a very good bottle of cabernet franc with a few years' worth of bottle age to allow its tannins to soften up a bit more. Good, honest juice. 2017-2030. **88.**

Bonnezeaux

1996 Bonnezeaux “Cuvée Zénith”- René Renou

The 1996 Bonnezeaux “Cuvée Zénith” from René Renou, the head of the INAO in France from 2000 until his passing in the summer of 2006, is a lovely wine that is fully mature and drinking with great charm and vivacity. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a bright and mature mélange of apricot, orange, citrus blossoms and barley sugar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nicely light on its feet, with still lovely acids, fine complexity and very good length and grip on the bouncy finish. A very pretty example. 2015-2030. **91.**

Moulin Touchais

The Moulin Touchais estate was founded in 1787 by the Touchais family, who has continued to oversee the direction of this Anjou property for eight consecutive generations. The current head of the family estate is Jean-Marie Touchais, who succeeded his father Joseph as winemaker here in 1990. The family owns thirty-five hectares of vines within the appellation of Coteaux du Layon and an additional one hundred and fifteen hectares of Anjou, which were used for the production of simple reds, whites and rosés in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, but the production from which have been sold off to négociants since the passing of Joseph Touchais. From my earliest days in the wine trade, Moulin Touchais has been famous for their enormous cellar of older vintages and their availability on the market, so that when I was first starting out in the early 1980s, one could easily source old wines here from the top vintages of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, and indeed, the very first bottle of Moulin Touchais I ever had the pleasure to taste was the 1953. However, the practice of holding back their vintages of Coteaux du Layon only began during the tenure of Joseph Touchais and was a response to the very sluggish economic climate in the immediate wake of the second world war. Prior to the war, the domaine had offered its bottlings of Coteaux du Layon within a few years of the vintage, like all of their neighbors, but as the sweeter wines here were selling very sluggishly, Joseph Touchais decided to tuck the younger ones away in the cellar and start to offer more of the older wines. As he had built up a very good business selling less expensive dry wines, (in particular, his bottling of Rosé from the village of Tigné was extremely popular in this era) from the family's sizable vineyard holdings outside of Coteaux du Layon in the '40s and '50s, he had the cash flow wines that allowed him to age his Coteaux du Layon for many years before offering them on the market. From this period began the custom of aging each vintage of Moulin Touchais for a minimum of ten years in the cellar prior to its release and for retaining significant stocks of older vintages to offer the market at the same time. For example, the famed 1959 Moulin Touchais was still

available from the estate up until 2006, and today, one can still order bottles of the 1985 or the 1971!



A beautiful fall day in the vineyards of Moulin Touchais.

The estate itself is based in the village of Doué-la-Fontaine, which is located just outside the eastern edge of the Coteaux du Layon appellation. The thirty-five hectares of vines that the domaine owns within the Coteaux du Layon AOC are found in the villages within the boundaries of the AOC on this end of Coteaux du Layon, and here the hillsides are not as steep as those that overlook the Layon River further west in the direction of Bonnezeaux and the domaine's parcels are also set back a bit from the waterside. This means that morning fogs off of the river are not particularly prevalent and the formation of botrytis in this section of Coteaux du Layon is not frequent, so that the Moulin Touchais wines will often get their sweetness as much from the concentration of sugars through dehydration and late picking as from noble rot, with only one or two vintages per decade showing a very significant glazing from botrytis. Consequently, the wines are not as high in residual sugar as many examples from further west in the appellation, hovering usually around ninety grams per liter in most vintages and possess a raciness and cut that is not always found in Coteaux du Layon. Moulin Touchais also takes the practice of picking between fifteen and twenty percent of their grapes each year on the early side, to give the finished wine a great chassis of acidity for long-term cellaring, and then making four or five further passes through the vineyard later in the season, to collect desiccated or nobly rotten

grapes to provide the sweetness for the finished wine. No vintage has been offered here before it has aged ten years in the cellars, and typically, the wines do not really start to show any signs of maturity until their twentieth birthday. The wines are fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement tanks, that are lined with either enamel or glass, and then bottled on the early side, in the spring following the harvest. The domaine will produce a Coteaux du Layon bottling in every vintage, and then wait the requisite ten years before deciding if the wine will be of sufficiently high quality to be released under the Moulin Touchais label, with vintages that are not deemed serious enough sold off to négociants in bulk. Within the fifteen kilometers of chalk tunnels under their winery in Doué-la-Fontaine lie well more than a million bottles of Moulin Touchais awaiting their initial ten years of aging or for orders to arrive for older bottles, and the Touchais family continues to recork, top off and affix new labels to every older vintage offered before it leaves the cellars, so this is one of the greatest sources in the world for pristine bottles of old vintage chenin blanc.

2005 Coteaux du Layon- Moulin Touchais

The 2005 vintage at Moulin Touchais was a botrytis year in the vineyards and the domaine feels this is destined to be one of the great classic years for the wine. At age ten, it is certainly very, very impressive, offering up a still fairly youthful, but deep and pure bouquet of white peach, quince, honeycomb, chalky soil tones, acacia blossoms and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and beautifully glazed, with a great core, superb focus and grip and crisp acids on the very, very long and complex finish. This is still a baby and is probably a good dozen years away from really starting to mature, but it is awfully easy to drink already and clearly will be one of the legendary vintages of Moulin Touchais in the fullness of time. 2015-2065+. **95+**.

2004 Coteaux du Layon- Moulin Touchais

The 2004 vintage is a complete contrast to the glazed 2005, as this was a year with very little botrytis to be found in the Moulin Touchais vineyards, but the wine is still very interesting in its more racier style. The bouquet offers up notes of quince, apple, lanolin, chalky soil and white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, snappy and nascently complex, with a good core, a fine girdle of acidity and impressive grip and focus on the long and youthful finish. This does not have the same puppy fat of the 2005 and consequently will be a bit more difficult to drink in its youth, but there is depth and complexity here and with sufficient bottle age, it will be a very tasty example. 2020-2055+. **92**.

2002 Coteaux du Layon- Moulin Touchais

The 2002 vintage of Moulin Touchais is really beautiful, and though it is not as marked by botrytis as the legend in the making 2005, there is depth, complexity and personality to burn in this beautiful young wine. The superb nose is still quite primary, but shows lovely purity in its mélange of peach, quince, a touch of wet wool, chalk dusty soil tones, a touch of fresh pineapple and a nice touch of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with impeccable focus and grip, blossoming complexity and great length and cut on the very, very refined finish. This is more adolescently “dusty” at the moment than the 2005, but with four or five more years, it should start to really enter into its plateau of fine drinking and will be stunning once it does reach this moment in its evolution. It should prove to be an exceptional year of Moulin Touchais and drink beautifully for decades. 2020-2060+. **94+**.

1997 Coteaux du Layon- Moulin Touchais

The 1997 and 1996 vintages were two very top, top years in Anjou, with the wines quite differently styled, but both years producing superb examples of Moulin Touchais. The 1997 is a nicely botrytized wine, delivering a deep and still quite youthful bouquet of fresh apricot, quince, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, honey, citrus peel and still a touch of adolescent wet wool in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerful in personality for Moulin Touchais, with a rock solid core, superb complexity and a very, very long, well-balanced and promising finish. The 1997 is eminently drinkable today, but the wine is still very much climbing and I would try to keep my hands off of bottles of this great wine for at least another five years and really let it blossom fully. 2020-2075. **95.**

1996 Coteaux du Layon- Moulin Touchais

The 1996 vintage of Moulin Touchais is not as glazed with botrytis as the 1997 and relies more on desiccated fruit and late harvest ripeness to attain its sweetness, which gives it a different aromatic and flavor profile than the 1997, but the wine is every bit as profound. The excellent nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of fresh pineapple, quince, chalky soil, incipient notes of the honeycomb to follow, orange peel, bee pollen and a potpourri of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very racy in personality, with a great core of fruit, laser-like focus, striking soil signature and stunning length and grip on the electric finish. The 1997 has more flash at the present time and will always be the bigger wine, but my heart is won by the precision, refinement and inherent complexity of the racy 1996! 2020-2075. **95+.**

1994 Coteaux du Layon- Moulin Touchais

The 1994 vintage was not an ideal one at Moulin Touchais, but this is the beauty of holding a wine ten years in the cellar before deciding its future, as the wine has developed a very intriguing personality with bottle age and shows another side of Coteaux du Layon. The bouquet is fairly deep-pitched, probably due to the less than ideal weather patterns of 1994, but also complex and vibrant, wafting from the glass in a mix of yellow plum, wet wool, chalky soil tones, desiccated quince and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and now fully mature, with solid framing acids and good focus, but with only moderate length on the wide open finish. Not a great vintage of Moulin Touchais, but also a pretty tasty wine for near-term drinking. 2015-2025+. **87.**

1985 Coteaux du Layon- Moulin Touchais

The 1985 vintage of Moulin Touchais has now reached its honeyed apogee of peak maturity and is drinking very well indeed. The bouquet delivers a fine blend of orange, quince paste, a touch of citrus peel, new leather, tea leaves and salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with tertiary layers of complexity, good acids and fine length and grip on the focused and classy finish. Not a blockbuster year for Moulin Touchais, the 1985 has aged very gracefully and is now at its peak. 2015-2040. **92.**

1981 Coteaux du Layon- Moulin Touchais

The 1981 vintage is one of those surprises that the domaine finds on occasion when they allow a decade to elapse before making decision on whether or not to release a wine under their label, as this was not a great year out of the blocks, but the wine aged very nicely over its first ten years and eventually merited a release from the domaine. Today, the wine is fully mature and very nice, offering up scents of quince jelly, orange rind, a touch of nuttiness, barley sugar and lovely soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite snappy, with fine mid-palate depth, lovely complexity and a long, balanced and classy finish. It does not quite possess the same dimension at the 1985, but it is not far off that wine in quality and is a very good value

in the market. I should note that the last bottle of the 1981 I had a couple of years ago showed even better, so perhaps our bottle was not in fine form. 2015-2040. **90.**

1971 Coteaux du Layon- Moulin Touchais

Interestingly, the domaine did not consider 1971 a top flight vintage out of the blocks, as it was classified in the “good, but not great” camp, but the wine has aged very, very well and has steadily climbed in the estimation of everyone at Moulin Touchais as the years have rolled by. Today, the wine is stellar, offering up a pure and complex nose of orange, sweet quince, honey, new leather, sweet almonds, a fine base of soil and a topnote of barley sugar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless in its balance, with a great core, bright acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long and complex finish. A classic vintage of Moulin Touchais. 2015-2040. **94.**

1964 Coteaux du Layon- Moulin Touchais

All of us at the table had tasted superior examples of the 1964 Moulin Touchais previously, as this particular bottle had been sourced at auction and was probably not one hundred percent pristine. But even a slightly subpar bottle of the 1964 is still a tasty glass of wine, as it offers up a deep and tertiary blend of baked peaches and quince, sweet nutty tones, a touch of lanolin, orange peel, new leather, a bit of soil and a topnote of tea leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and tangy, with a fine core, very good focus and grip and a long, complex finish. Pristine bottles are more vibrant and a bit less evolved in personality and probably merit three points higher score. 2015-2030+. **92.**

1959 Coteaux du Layon- Moulin Touchais

The 1959 vintage has always been one of my reference point years of Moulin Touchais and this most recent bottle was breathtaking. The nose jumps from the glass in a deep and *à point* blaze of tangerine, apricot, sweet quince, a lovely dollop of soil, buttered pecans, honey and citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and still very vibrant, with laser-like focus, zesty acids and superb balance and grip on the complex and very long finish. This is one of the finest vintages of Moulin Touchais I have had the pleasure to taste and the wine continues to drink at its absolute zenith at age fifty-six- with no signs of slowing down for decades to come! Great juice. 2015-2040+. **96.**

Nineteenth Century Reserve “Cuvée Centenaire”- Moulin Touchais

In the 1950s, Joseph Touchais decided to recork all of the nineteenth century bottles remaining in the Moulin Touchais cellars. With bottles that still had exceptional fill levels, he simply recorked the bottle as they were, but for those with lower fill levels, he decided to blend them all in a single cask and rebottle them together as a blend, rather than trying to top off old vintages with a younger wine. From this small cask came a few dozen bottles of pre-phylloxera blended Moulin Touchais, from vintages ranging from the 1850s through 1899. The blended wine was then bottled again in the variety of old, hand-blown bottles that the ancient vintages had originally resided in, so that each bottle would be unique, though the nineteenth century blend inside is the same wine. The domaine has never commercialized these bottles, but occasionally shares one at the domaine or makes them available for vertical tastings such as the one I attended in New York in October. The wine is utterly brilliant and still quite vigorous, as it wafts from the glass in a deep and tertiary blend of orange peel, apricot, a bit of caramelized banana, a touch of *rancio*, new leather, buttered nuts and a beautifully complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full-bodied, with great purity and complexity, a lovely core and superb length and grip on the perfectly balanced and still very vibrant finish. This ageless beauty still has decades and decades of life ahead of it! 2015-2050. **96.**

Coteaux du Layon

1997 Coteaux du Layon “Rochefort”- Château Pierre Bise (Papin-Chevalier)

The 1997 Coteaux du Layon “Rochefort” from Claude Papin is a rather monolithic, heavily glazed wine that offers up a botrytized nose of apricot, new leather, honey and tea leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rather lacking in complexity, with plenty of concentration at the core, but also a bit of elevated alcohol on the backend and slightly green acids on the long finish. This is perfectly acceptable, but no better. 2015-2035. **87.**

1996 Coteaux du Layon “Chaume”- Château Pierre Bise (Papin-Chevalier)

Claude Pepin’s 1996 Coteaux du Layon “Chaume” is aromatically brighter and more interesting than his 1997 Rochefort bottling, but this too suffers a bit from underripe acidity that gives a touch of spiky greenness to the structure on the backend. The bouquet is quite nobly rotten in its mélange of tangerine, apricot, leather, honey and a whisper of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and younger than its 1997 counterpart, with a plush core, good focus and grip, but again, slightly spiky, underripe acids poking out on the finish. Again, this is not bad, but not special. 2015-2040. **87+.**

1996 Coteaux du Layon “Chaume”- Domaine Soucheau

The 1996 Coteaux du Layon “Chaume” from Domaine Soucheau is another very heavily glazed wine, but this has more depth and dimension than the examples tasted alongside of it from Claude Pepin. The bouquet is deep and honeyed, wafting from the glass in a blend of apricot, orange, incipient notes of tea leaves, honey, leather and a nice topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and creamy with botrytis, but without quite the same complexity as is found on the nose, with good acids, fine depth and a very long, nicely balanced finish. This is a very tasty wine that would be really special if the aromatic complexity could be replicated on the palate, but here, the botrytis glaze presents a bit less complex picture than on the nose. Still, this is quite tasty and a very nice wine. 2015-2040. **90.**

1996 Coteaux du Layon “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Soucherie (Pierre-Yves Tijou)

The 1996 old vine bottling of Coteaux du Layon from Pierre-Yves Tijou is a lovely wine that has just now reached its apogee of peak drinkability, but should continue to cruise along for decades to come. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a deep, pure and nicely desiccated blend of grapefruit, pineapple, lanolin, chalky soil tones, orange peel and an esthery topnote redolent of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely zesty, with a great core of fruit, crisp acids and superb length and grip on the complex and beautifully focused finish. This is a gorgeous bottle from a classic vintage. 2015-2045. **93.**

Quarts de Chaume

2010 Quarts de Chaume- Domaine des Baumard (Screwcap)

The 2010 Quarts de Chaume from Domaine des Baumard is truly a stunning wine hamstrung by its closure, with some signs of reduction already evident on both the nose and palate. The bouquet has just a weird touch of vegetality from the closure in its otherwise utterly classic aromatic mélange of peach, pineapple, honeycomb, chalky soil tones, a bit of lanolin and the closure topnote of cooked asparagus. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a great core of fruit, very clean botrytis, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the slightly edgy, metallic finish (again from the screwcap). This is a 97 point dessert wine from chenin blanc- with a 50 point closure. Today, the wine is still plenty enjoyable to drink with an extended decanting, but the reduction is going to lock in and kill this wine in the next several years and what a waste it will be when that happens. But, for now, the screwcap

only takes a handful of points away and the wine is still quite tasty to drink, but it should have been a legend for the next thirty or forty years! This is the finest vintage of Quarts de Chaume from Domaine des Baumard since the brilliant 1989, and perhaps the worst closure decision in recent history. 2015-2025+? **91.**

Clos de la Coulée de Serrant

Clos de la Coulée de Serrant is a seven hectare vineyard owned in its entirety by the Joly family. It lies on the northern end of the vineyards of Savennières and has its own appellation these days. The family domaine has been run for many years now by Nicolas Joly, who is one of the leaders of the natural wine movement in France and he has farmed these seven hectares biodynamically for almost as long as he has been in charge of the estate, as he first began the conversion of this monopole over to biodynamics in 1984. Monsieur Joly's first vintage making wine at the family domaine was 1981, with his family having purchased the property back in 1962. Prior to the Joly family buying Coulée de Serrant, the property had passed through a myriad of different owners in the wake of phylloxera sweeping through the region and devastating the vineyards up through the Second World War. To underscore just how devastating phylloxera was in Savennières in the late 1800s, the vineyards were not fully replanted again at Coulée de Serrant until 1920! The Jolys had originally been looking for a home for their retirement years when they first saw the property in the early 1960s and fell in love with the premises, and ironically, they were not initially as interested in cultivating one of the great vineyards in the Loire. Nicolas Joly was the first oenologically-trained member of the family to take over the winemaking at the estate directly, as his father, André Joly, was a doctor by métier, with his practice in Angers. In the very early days of the Joly proprietorship, it was Madame Denise Joly who was responsible for the winemaking at the domaine, with the assistance of a local consulting winemaker.

Nicolas Joly was also not a vigneron from his earliest days of his career, as he studied abroad during his university days, earning an MBA from Columbia University in the mid-1970s and working for a few years for J. P Morgan in North America before deciding that banking was not his calling and returning to the family estate in 1977. He studied winemaking at the University of Bordeaux for two years and in 1981, crossed paths with the writings of the "father of biodynamics", Rudolph Steiner, and his path was set at Coulée de Serrant. By the 1985 vintage, the vineyards were certified biodynamique, making Coulée de Serrant the flagship estate of the biodynamique movement in its very earliest days. Throughout his career, Nicolas Joly has been one of the most eloquent and vociferous proponents of biodynamique viticulture and natural winemaking, with his celebrity in these circles sometimes even overshadowing the wines at the domaine! In the last few years, Nicolas Joly has been joined at the helm of the estate by his talented daughter, Virginie Joly, who has been responsible for the winemaking at the domaine for the last several vintages and the estate looks to be in very, very good hands for the future when it becomes time for a generational shift at the helm.

The vineyard of Coulée de Serrant was first cleared and planted by the Cistercian monks all the way back in 1130 and the wine has long been one of the greatest and most famous white wines of the Loire Valley. The vineyards today are quite old, with Monsieur Joly maintaining a minimum age of at least thirty-five years of age for these chenin blanc vines, with the oldest in the Clos reaching back now to eighty years of age. The Cistercian order built a small monastery

right alongside of the vineyard in its earliest days, and Nicolas Joly has lived here since his return to the estate. Right alongside the property is also the Château de la Roche aux Moines, which was beautifully restored in 1839, after having been partially destroyed during the revolution. This was the original house that André and Denise Joly fell in love with back in the early 1960s and prompted their offer to buy the estate; Madame Joly continues to live here to this day. In addition to the Clos de la Coulée de Serrant vineyard itself, the Joly family also owns 3.5 hectares of vines in the neighboring fine vineyard of Roche aux Moines, which they bottle under the cuvée name of “Clos de la Bergerie” and also four other parcels of vines that lie just outside of the walls of the Clos, and which produce their more basic level bottling of Savennières, which they call “Les Vieux Clos”. The average age of the vines in these parcels is between twenty and twenty-five years of age, so nowhere near as venerable as in the Clos. Happily, the Joly family has planted their vineyards with cuttings taken from the oldest vines in the Clos in recent times, so much of the genetic material here is selection massale, rather than clonal. All of the wines at the domaine are fermented in older oak casks, which range in size from five and six hundred liters to some used Bordeaux barrels of two hundred and twenty-five liters. Virginie Joly favors the larger demi-muids for fermentation, so in the future, she will probably swap out all of the smaller casks for these larger barrels. Prior to Nicolas Joly returning to the estate in the late 1970s, chestnut barrels were used here for the fermentations and élevage, and a touch of this different wood cask can be found still in the beautiful 1967 Coulée de Serrant reported on below. By the vintages of the mid-1980s, all the old chestnut had been replaced with used oak barrels or demi-muids and subsequent vintages have all resided in older oak. The cellars lie under the château on the property. Solely indigenous yeasts are used for the fermentations, with no temperature control and the wines are bottled without cold stabilization, after two or three rackings and a very light filtration. Malolactic fermentation is not encouraged for the wines, but if a cask decides to go through malo, no effort is made to stop this, as we are in the epicenter of the natural winemaking movement.

The Clos de la Coulée de Serrant is a beautifully situated vineyard, with a south by southeasterly exposition and a natural propensity for botrytis, as it sits in the morning fogs that waft up from the adjacent Loire River. Interestingly, though the soil here is predominantly red schist, I often find the soil tones in the finished wines very “chalky” in personality when the wines are mature. Since the vintages of the mid-1990s, Nicolas Joly has decided to cultivate this botrytis every year (rather than try to pick ahead of it) and the grapes are harvested very late each fall, with pickers making four or five passes through the vineyards during harvest and selecting for the botrytized grapes. As he observes on the domaine’s website, “I personally believe that chenin- along with riesling- is one of the very few grape varieties which can only fully express their deep personalities through a fairly advanced maturity that contains some noble rot.” This has marked a dramatic change in style for the wine, as previously, though there was quite often a touch of botrytis influence in the Clos de la Coulée de Serrant bottling in many years, the wine was essentially always a dry wine that sought to avoid an overtly botrytized personality. Long-time fans of the estate are certainly split about this decision to encourage a botrytized character in the wine since the mid-1990s, for the more glazed style of the wine has certainly shifted some of the focus away from the great underlying terroir of the Clos de la Coulée de Serrant in the finished wine in recent years. Interestingly, Monsieur Joly does not allow the botrytis to run through the vineyard for the stylistic difference it brings to the wine, but rather because he feels that the arrival of the noble rot is the proper end of the growing cycle for the grapes, and as he

likes to say, “I do not want only a good wine, but also a true wine.” I do not know how “true” the wines were at Coulée de Serrant from 1990 back to 1967, which were the topic of our vertical tasting, but those are the wines I want more of in the future from this great terroir!



1990 Savennières “Clos de la Coulée de Serrant”- Domaine Joly

The 1990 Coulée de Serrant is a beautiful example of the vintage and is now starting to really drink well at age twenty-five. There is just a whisper of botrytis evident here, as the wine wafts from the glass in a deep, complex and beautifully pure blend of pineapple, quince, chalky soil tones, lanolin and a touch of lemon peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine signature of soil, lovely focus and grip and a long, vibrant and very classy finish. An excellent vintage of Coulée de Serrant that is just hitting its apogee and will continue to drink for decades to come. 2015-2045. **93.**

1989 Savennières “Clos de la Coulée de Serrant”- Domaine Joly

1989 is a great, classic vintage of Coulée de Serrant and our bottle at the vertical in September was absolutely singing, though it was interesting to note that of all the vintages we followed over the course of four hours of tasting, this developed a touch of oxidation faster than any of the other years and perhaps this is indicative that the 1989 may not last quite as long as the great years of the past here. In any event, the wine is stunning on both the nose and palate, soaring from the glass in a pure and complex constellation of sweet quince, apple, a complex base of chalky soil tones, a nice dollop of waxiness, a bit of fruit skin and a discreet topnote of savory elements. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with impeccable balance, zesty acids and a very, very long, nascently complex and utterly complete finish. The 1989 is one of the recent legendary years of Coulée de Serrant and, though the wine is absolutely delicious to drink today, it should continue to improve and blossom more fully over the next decade and last for a very long time. 2015-2060. **96.**

1988 Savennières “Clos de la Coulée de Serrant”- Domaine Joly

The 1988 vintage in Savennières is nowhere near as ripe and complete as either 1989 or 1990, and yet I found myself absolutely drawn to this brilliant vintage of Coulée de Serrant. With the volume of ripe fruit turned down a bit on both the nose and palate in the '88, other facets of this magical *terroir* are allowed to take center stage and this is a gorgeous wine. The exceptional nose is low fat and beautifully framed with botanical elements, as it jumps from the glass in a very complex and vibrant blend of lime peel, a hint of pear, beeswax, a vivid base of soil complexities, lanolin and a smorgasbord of botanical elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very precise, with great focus and grip, superb complexity and a very long, chiseled finish of enormous energy and cut. There is an inner beauty on display here in this less ripe vintage that is absolutely breathtaking, and though this is not objectively the finest of the range of older vintages we had at our vertical, this was unequivocally my favorite wine! 2015-2040. **94.**

1985 Savennières “Clos de la Coulée de Serrant”- Domaine Joly

The 1985 Coulée de Serrant is an absolute classic, and is an important vintage in the history of the domaine, as this is the first certified biodynamic year for the estate and also most likely the first where no old chestnut casks were used for the *elevage*. The wine is aging very gracefully and offers up a complex and *à point* bouquet of quince, smoke, chalky soil tones, a touch of wet wool, fruit skin and a topnote of lanolin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with fine mid-palate intensity, seamless balance and a very long, refined and focused finish. A superb vintage of Coulée de Serrant that is now well into its peak plateau of drinkability, but has years and years of life still ahead of it. 2015-2035+. **93.**

1983 Savennières “Clos de la Coulée de Serrant”- Domaine Joly

The 1983 vintage of Coulée de Serrant is another really lovely bottle at its apogee, and it makes an interesting contrast to the 1985 that preceded it. The '83 is riper than the '85, but every bit as precise and clean on the nose and palate, as it wafts from the glass in a lovely mélange of lime, a touch of pineapple, quince, lanolin, chalky soil tones and a bit of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and well-endowed at the core, with lovely acids and grip, fine focus and a very, very long, complex and vibrant finish. Stylistically, this is not dissimilar from the 1989, though not quite as complete as its younger sibling. A lovely wine. 2015-2035. **93.**

1967 Savennières “Clos de la Coulée de Serrant”- Domaine A. Joly

The 1967 vintage of Coulée de Serrant had André Joly's name on the label, though his wife Denise oversaw the winemaking at the estate in this era. As an interesting side note, Madame Joly, despite being in charge of one of the greatest dry white wine-producing estates in the world, always had a preference for red wine, and there is a small patch of cabernet franc still planted on the property to make a bit of “house red wine” for her. The 1967 Coulée de Serrant is a timeless beauty, with even a touch lighter color than the 1985 and 1983 that were served ahead of it in our vertical. The bouquet is superb, offering up a fresh and low fat mix of white peach, yellow fruit, beeswax, just a whisper of quince, chalky soil tones, just a whisper of chestnut and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully focused, with a fine core, great soil signature, snappy acids and excellent length and grip on the still very vibrant finish. At age forty-eight, the 1967 Coulée de Serrant is still very clearly at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability and is not going to decline for decades to come! A beautiful wine. 2015-2035+. **94.**

Savennières

2013 Savennières “La Jalousie”- Domaine du Closel

The 2013 La Jalousie from Domaine du Closel is another very strong bottle of Savennières in another difficult vintage. The bouquet is deep, complex and shows already a bit of development in its blend of baked apple and peach, chalk dusty soil tones, lanolin and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very long on the backend, with a rock solid core, fine balance and a ripe, complex and snappy finish. This is drinking very well out of the blocks and should keep well for at least another five to seven years. A fine effort in 2013. 2015-2022+? **90.**

2013 Savennières “Clos du Papillon”- Domaine du Closel

The 2013 vintage of Clos du Papillon from Domaine du Closel offers up a complex and fairly open bouquet of quince, apple, chalky soil tones, wet wool, a bit of youthful chenin dustiness and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly primary in profile, with a rock solid core, and truly excellent focus and grip and a very long, crisp and really well-balanced finish. This is one of the best bottles of 2013 Savennières that I have yet tasted, with backend energy that was really difficult to attain in this vintage. 2015-2030. **92.**

2012 Savennières- Domaine des Baumard (screwcap)

The 2012 Savennières from Domaine des Baumard is a very strong effort for this difficult vintage and today, is showing no ill effects from its screwcap. The bouquet is bright and deep, wafting from the glass in a blend of grapefruit, quince, lovely soil tones and orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nicely balanced, with a fine core, good acids (particularly for a 2012), blossoming complexity and lovely length and grip on the focused and nicely balanced finish. The alcohol here is an even thirteen percent and the wine is nicely precise and soil-driven as a result. I would not suggest holding it long-term, as this closure's track record is not great, but for drinking over the near-term, this is really a very, very successful 2012 Savennières. 2015-2018+? **89+.**

2012 Savennières “Clos du Papillon”- Domaine des Baumard (screwcap)

The 2012 Clos du Papillon from Domaine des Baumard is also a very strong example of the vintage and a wine that is quite forward stylistically out of the blocks, but with a good spine of acidity to give it bounce on the backend. The nose offers up a deep and complex blend of apple, lemon zest, a touch of fresh pineapple, lovely soil tones, a touch of lanolin and a lovely topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, fine framing acids and lovely length and grip on the wide open and classy finish. This too is thirteen percent alcohol, but it is a touch riper in profile than the straight Savennières 2012 from Baumard, which gives it more mid-palate depth and length. Really a lovely wine and I wish it had been bottled under natural cork, as it shows every sign of aging well, but under screwcap, I would again opt for drinking it on the earlier side and not taking any chances with reduction down the road. Good juice. 2015-2020+? **91.**

2012 Savennières “Fidès”- Eric Morgat

The 2012 Savennières “Fidès” bottling from Eric Morgat is his new name for the cuvée that was previously known as “L’Enclos”, with 2012 being the first vintage where Monsieur Morgat has utilized the name. As this bottling has been steadily including fruit from fine new parcels that he purchased and planted in the late 1990s, Eric felt that it was now time to reflect this addition of new, top *terroirs* in the blend by a name change for the cuvée. The 2012 Fidès

comes in at a very judicious 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a fine nose of apple, quince, lanolin, chalky soil tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthful and primary in profile, with a good core, bright acids and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. Given how difficult the 2012 vintage was in the region, this is really a lovely result. 2015-2030+. **90+**.

2011 Savennières “l’Enclos”- Eric Morgat

It had been a year since I last crossed paths with a bottle of the 2011 Savennières “l’Enclos” from Eric Morgat and the wine continues to drink very well indeed, with its fourteen percent alcohol very nicely harnessed in the structure of the wine. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite classic in its mélange of apple, quince, beeswax, lanolin, a touch of citrus peel and a complex base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with superb cut and grip on the long and very nicely focused finish. With one year more of bottle age, the wine is not quite as racy as it was out of the blocks and perhaps a tad more muscular in style, but this remains an exceptional bottle of Savennières that is drinking quite well in its youth, but also seems structured to cruise along into a fine old age if spared from premox. 2015-2030+. **93**.

1995 Savennières “Clos du Papillon”- Domaine des Baumard

Intuitively, I fully understand that the best vineyards in the appellation of Savennières are prone to botrytis, due to their proximity to the river, and in a vintage like 1995, some noble rot is going to be inescapable. Consequently, the bit of botrytis influence in the 1995 Clos du Papillon is quite understandable, and probably in its youth, I would not have minded its shading in the wine. However, at age twenty, I find it a bit distracting, as time has allowed the bit of noble rot here to take away a considerable portion of the wine’s elegance on the backend and diminished the soil signature. The bouquet shows a nice range of aromatics in its blend of honeyed quince, orange peel, smoke and dried pineapple. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a bit of residual sweetness, a good core, and very good length and grip on the still quite vibrant finish. But, the backend is not particularly precise today and shows a bit of bitterness that is not from the chenin grape, but from the botrytis. This is okay, but was probably much more interesting to drink in its youth. 2015-2020+. **87**.

1995 Savennières “Doux”- La Pierre du Coulaire (Papin-Chevalier)

I am generally not a huge fan of botrytis in my Savennières , but this richly glazed, dessert wine version certainly is quite impressive. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite tropical in its botrytis glazed notes of apricot, orange, cherries, honey, incipient notes of new leather and barley sugar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced with a creamy core of fruit, fine focus, ripe, vibrant acidity and excellent length and grip on the lovely finish. The acidity here really lifts the very significant residual sugar here nicely on the backend. A lovely wine. 2015-2035. **92**.

Saumur-Champigny and Chinon Blanc and Rosé

2014 Chinon Blanc- Domaine Bernard Baudry

This is the first vintage of the Baudry family’s Chinon Blanc that I can recall tasting and the wine is excellent in 2014, delivering a fine, youthful chenin blanc bouquet of quince, lemon peel, chalky soils, wet wool, incipient smokiness and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a fine core and transparency,

crisp acids and fine soil drive on the long, youthful finish that closes with a properly bitter chenin blanc closing note of citrus peel. A lovely wine that should age for at least a decade or more, but is already quite tasty. 2015-2025+. **89+**.

2014 Chinon Blanc “la Croix Boissée”- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The Chinon Blanc “la Croix Boissée” from Mathieu Baudry hails from the top section of the vineyard, which is very high in limestone, that Mathieu’s father Bernard planted over to chenin blanc twenty years ago. The wine is barrel-fermented and aged for a year in cask prior to bottling, with the 2014 offering up a superb aromatic constellation of lime, sweet quince, glorious limestone minerality, a touch of lanolin, orange peel and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and still quite primary in personality, with a fine core, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the youthful finish. Unlike the regular bottling of Chinon Blanc from the Baudry family, the 2014 la Croix Boissée could really do with a year or two of bottle age to allow it to more fully blossom. It will be an excellent drink once it has had a chance to uncoil properly. 2016-2025+. **91**.

2013 Saumur Blanc- Domaine Filliatreau

The 2013 Saumur Blanc from Domaine Filliatreau is a young and pretty wine that offers up a bright bouquet of quince, lemon, a touch of beeswax, youthful chenin blanc notes of chalk dust and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and nicely round on the attack, with a fine core, lovely soil signature and a long, vibrant and still quite primary finish. This has lovely stuffing and bounce right now, with more complexity likely to emerge with further bottle age. My only reservation with keeping this for several more years is that it is closed with a plastic cork, but other than its closure, this wine has the balance to easily keep a decade or more. A very good, honest example of Saumur blanc and a very good value. 2015-2025? **88+**.

2013 Saumur Blanc “Arcane”- Château de Fosse-Seche (Adrien et Guillaume Pire)

The 2013 Saumur Blanc “Arcane” from Adrien and Guillaume Pire is a fine young wine, with just a touch of the dusty chalkiness that one finds in young chenin blanc evident on the nose and palate today, but with fine depth and underlying complexity. The bouquet delivers a complex mélange of quince, grapefruit, chalk dust, orange peel and wet wool. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a good core, sound acids and very good length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. This is a very fine example of the vintage and all this wine needs is a year of bottle age to really blossom. 2016-2026. **89+**.

2009 Saumur Blanc “Brèze”- Clos Rougeard

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

1996 Saumur Blanc- Château de Hureau (Philippe Vatan)

The 1996 Saumur Blanc from Philippe Vatan’s Château de Hureau has aged pretty well and continues to drink nicely in its tertiary stage of development. The color is showing its age, but the nose continues to deliver a pleasant constellation of honey, apricot, wet wool, soil tones and fruit skin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with

a fully mature personality, still pretty good acidity and very respectable length and grip on the finish. Not bad at all, and particularly for a wine that was probably meant for simple quaffing over the first few years of its life in bottle. 2015-2018. **87.**

1995 Chinon Blanc “Champ-Chemin”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The 1995 Chinon Blanc “Champ-Chemin” from Domaine Olga Raffault remains a very young wine at age twenty, but is not particularly impressive on any other front. The nose shows a bit of airplane glue in its mélange of crab apple, chalky soil tones, citrus peel and grassy overtones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rather lacking in complexity, with bright acids and good grip, but not a lot of development showing. This is drinkable and seems to have been hardly touched by time, but not particularly inspiring. 2015-2025. **85.**



The Great Red Wine Appellations of the Central Loire

Saumur-Champigny

2014 Saumur-Champigny- Domaine Filliatreau

The “regular” bottling of Saumur-Champigny from Domaine Filliatreau is sealed with a plastic cork in 2014, which I cannot really understand, given that agglomerated corks cost the same price and offer up a better track record for aging. But, the closure is the only thing that this wine does not have going for it, as it jumps from the glass in a complex and vibrant blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, *tuffeau* soil tones, cigar smoke and a bit of youthful tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, focused and quite classy finish. This is a lovely wine that is very accessible already, but will be even better with a year or two of bottle age, to allow more

secondary layers of complexity to start to show. A lovely wine, but how long will it last with a plastic cork? 2015-2025? **89+**.

2013 Saumur-Champigny “Terres Chaudes”- Domaine des Roches Neuves

The Saumur-Champigny “Terres Chaudes” from Thierry Germain’s Domaine des Roches Neuves is his old vine cuvée, which he raised in a combination of older *demi-muids* and one wines casks that were previously used for his “La Marginale” bottling. The 2013 vintage of Terres Chaudes has turned out very well indeed, offering up quite good depth, a silky attack and a nice, tangy backend with a bit of tannin for grip. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of cassis, cigar ash, tree bark, dark soil tones, fresh herbs and a nice touch of roasted game. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and impressively soil-driven, with a good core, lovely focus, moderate tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This is approachable today, but will really be better with a few years in the cellar to allow the bit of chewy tannin on the backend to soften up completely. It should age quite nicely and prove to be a very stylish middleweight for many years to come. 2017-2035. **90+**.

2013 Saumur- Château Fouquet (Domaine Filliatreau)

The 2013 Saumur from the Filliatreau family’s Château Fouquet is really attractive, with great vibrancy on both the nose and palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a bright blend of red berries, dried eucalyptus, *tuffeau* soil tones, tobacco leaf and a touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and focused, with a lovely core, very modest tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This wine is already drinking very well, albeit still rather primary in personality, and should age nicely for ten to fifteen years. It is elegant and intensely flavored and really a superb value. 2015-2030. **92**.

2013 Saumur-Champigny “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Filliatreau

I love Domaine Filliatreau’s wines and it seems to me that they just keep getting a bit better with each passing vintage. Their Vieilles Vignes bottling is outstanding in 2013, with a degree of early elegance that I cannot recall in previous iterations. The bouquet is deep, pure and quite classy in its mélange of sweet cassis, a touch of black plum, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a bit of tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate is deep, full-bodied and focused, with fine complexity, a lovely core of fruit, moderate tannins and a long, perfectly balanced and youthful finish. Fine, fine juice that will be even better with a few years in the cellar. 2017-2035. **92**.

2013 Saumur-Champigny “Encore”- Domaine La Folie Lucé

The 2013 “Encore” bottling of Saumur-Champigny from Domaine La Folie Lucé is made from the relatively younger vines (thirty years of age) found in the 4.5 hectares of vines that proprietor Loïc Terquem has assembled since founding his estate in 2009. These are also on the sandier soils in the domaine’s vineyards and consequently, produce a naturally more forward example of Saumur-Champigny. The 2013 Encore tips the scales at a gentle 11.5 percent octane and offers up a classic nose of cassis, tree bark, a touch of new leather, a lovey base of soil and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, focused and tangy, with good intensity of flavor, very minimal tannins, bright acids and good transparency on the long and complex finish. This does not possess much mid-palate stuffing in reserve, but is nicely detailed and shows plenty of personality. That said, this is emphatically a lighter example of Saumur-Champigny and may not have sufficient core for some fans. 2015-2025. **88+**.

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

I have to confess that I did not buy the 2012 la Grande Vignole for my cellar, despite the excellence of the wine, based solely on the fact that it was closed with a plastic cork. Consequently, I have very happy to see another bottle of the 2012 in my pile of Loire samples, as I was very curious to see how it has progressed over the course of the last year. Happily, the wine is every bit as beautiful today as it was twelve months ago, wafting from the glass in a deep and complex aromatic blend of black cherries, dark berries, a fine base of dark soil, tree bark, a bit of tobacco leaf and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine-grained tannins, good focus and grip and a long, youthful finish. This has not aged at the dramatic pace I feared, based on its closure, and still has very good structure, but does not seem quite as vibrant in its fruit component as it did a year ago (but I do admit this could be my prejudice against the closure playing with my imagination). The wine is a very serious bottle of Saumur-Champigny and I would sleep better at night if I knew it had been sealed up with a natural cork! But, so far so good and the wine remains excellent. 2015-2025+? **92.**

2012 Saumur-Champigny “Eolithe”- Château de Fosse-Seche

The 2012 Saumur-Champigny “Eolithe” from Château de Fosse-Seche is an excellent wine on both the nose and palate, with a low fat and an impressively complex personality. The gorgeous young nose wafts from the glass in a blend of sweet dark berries, black cherries, cigar smoke, a great base of minerality (the soils here are iron-infused flint), a touch of tree bark and a topnote of new leather. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and soil-driven, with a good core, moderate tannins, lovely focus and balance and a long, complex and very classy finish. The Pire brothers farm Fosse-Seche *biodynamically* and make their wines quite naturally, so the 2012 is only 11.8 percent alcohol and quite low fat in personality, but the wine is a rock of stability and classical sensibilities of the highest order. Fine, fine juice. 2015-2030+. **91.**

2012 Saumur-Champigny “Tuffe”- Château Hureau (Philippe et Georges Vatan)

The 2012 vintage of Saumur-Champigny “Tuffe” from the Vatan family is quite a nice bottle in the making, and given how well this cuvée is now drinking from the even more challenging year of 2011, I like the odds of the 2012 really blossoming into an outstanding wine. The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, delivering scents of red and black cherries, a touch of dark berry, lovely soil tones, a dollop of both coffee bean and tree bark, incipient notes of menthol and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and velvety on the attack, with a very good core, moderate tannins, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is certainly approachable today, but really begs for a year or two more in the cellar to blossom, and will most likely put on a bit of mid-palate weight (as the 2011 has done) with a bit of bottle age. It really is a lovely and very classic example of Saumur-Champigny. 2017-2035. **92+.**

2012 Saumur-Champigny “les Poyeux”- Domaine Antoine Sanzay (magnum)

Antoine Sanzay took over for his father at a very young age, after his father’s untimely passing in 2002. He currently produces two different bottlings of Saumur-Champigny *rouge*, with his single vineyard les Poyeux raised in three year-old casks that he has sourced from Château Latour. The 2012 Poyeux, out of magnum, is still quite a youthful wine, but offers up lovely promise in its aromatic constellation of dark berries, black cherries, a youthful touch of bell pepper, cigar smoke and a gentle topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and still fairly youthful, with a good core, fine focus, moderate tannins and good

length and grip on the still quite primary finish. Out of magnum, this still needs a few more years of bottle age to start to stir. Good juice. 2019-2035+. **90+**.

2012 Saumur-Champigny “La Marginale”- Domaine des Roches Neuves

Thierry Germain’s La Marginale bottling, which hails from old vines in a parcel that faces due south and always ripens very well, is given a three week “cold soak” prior being fermented in old oak *foudres* and then aged in Bordeaux casks for a year and a half to two years prior to bottling. The 2012 is an excellent example of the vintage, with depth, nascent complexity and good structure for extended cellaring. The bouquet offers up an adolescent blend of cassis, dark berries, espresso, chalky soil tones, tree bark, cigar wrapper and a deft base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, suave and youthful in personality, with a lovely core, exceptional focus and grip, fine-grained tannins and outstanding balance on the very long, ripely tannic finish. This is clearly a wine that will need some time in the cellar to really blossom, but the constituent components here are simply outstanding and a few years’ worth of patience will be richly rewarded! Fine, fine juice. 2019-2040+. **92+**.

2011 Saumur-Champigny- Domaine des Coutures

Another year’s worth of bottle age has certainly not harmed this beautiful bottle of Saumur-Champigny, and the 2011 from Domaine des Coutures is really drinking with great style at the present time. The bouquet is pure and wide open, as it offers up scents of dark berries, espresso, a touch of menthol, dark soil tones and a gentle topnote of tree bark. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very bright, with a fine core, melting tannins, excellent complexity and a long, tangy and focused finish that closes with lovely soil signature and grip. This is high class juice and one of the best-kept secrets in the world of Loire Valley reds. 2015-2025+. **92**.

2011 Saumur-Champigny “Tuffe”- Château Hureau (Philippe et Georges Vatan)

It had been a year since I last tasted a bottle of the 2011 Saumur-Champigny “Tuffe” from Château de Hureau and the wine has blossomed very well indeed and is now wide open and drinking with lovely complexity and style. This is not a big vintage for this wine, but with now four years out from the harvest, it is now a superb, intensely flavored middleweight that offers up marvelous drinking. The first class bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of red and black berries, cigar ash, menthol, tree bark and a lovely base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and tangy, with a very respectable core, fine focus and grip, still a bit of backend tannin and lovely length and grip on the complex and very pure finish. Fine juice. 2015-2025. **92**.

2011 Saumur-Champigny “Lisagathe”- Château Hureau (Philippe et Georges Vatan)

The 2011 Lisagathe bottling of Saumur-Champigny from the Vatan is the current release of this cuvée and the wine is excellent. The youthful nose delivers a fine blend of sweet dark berries, cassis, tree bark, espresso, dark soil tones (there is quite a bit of clay in the topsoil over the *tuffeau* in the two parcels that go into the Lisagathe cuvée) and a bit of cigar wrapper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, sound acids and impressive length and grip on the focused and perfectly balanced finish. This deserves a few years in the cellar to blossom and should prove to be quite ageworthy. 2017-2035+. **92+**.

2010 Saumur-Champigny “Autrement”- Domaine La Folie Lucé

The 2010 Saumur-Champigny “Autrement” from Loïc Terquem is quite ripe for this property, coming in at 13.8 percent alcohol and reflecting the fine ripeness of this vintage. This was only Monsieur Terquem’s second vintage at the estate and it is quite clear that he hit the

ground running, as the wine offers up a deep and ripe nose of black raspberries, cassis, dark chocolate, cigar smoke and a faint suggestion of fresh apricot in the upper register. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and shows just a bit of *sur maturité*, with a rock solid core, chewy tannins and a long, broad-shouldered and complex finish. This is a good example of the riper side of the 2010 vintage, with plenty of stuffing and potential for longevity in the bottle, but it is just a touch overripe to my palate and this keeps its score down a bit. 2015-2030. **88.**

2007 Saumur-Champigny “le Clos”- Clos Rougeard

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

1999 Saumur-Champigny- Domaine David Léger

This is the first wine that I have tasted from David Léger and I was quite impressed with its quality. The wine is at its apogee of maturity at the present time, offering up a deep, evolved and still completely vibrant bouquet of cherries, menthol, coffee, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave on the attack, with a fine core, melted tannins, still sound acids and lovely length and grip on the focused and complex finish. Just a lovely bottle of Saumur-Champigny at its zenith. 2015-2025+. **92.**

1985 Saumur-Champigny- Château de Targé

The 1985 Saumur-Champigny from Château de Targé harkens back to a time when today’s ripeness levels were far from typical in the region, and this wine shows plenty of the vegetal bell pepper tones that once made Robert Parker run for cover whenever reds from the Loire Valley were opened. However, with air, this characteristic settles into the background for a bit and allows some of the other aromatic elements here to vie for attention. Eventually, the bouquet offers up a deep and complex nose of bell pepper, dried red berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, plenty of herbs, coffee and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very vibrant for a thirty year-old Saumur-Champigny, with a lovely core, still a whisper of tannin and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This never fully sheds its vegetal aspect, and in fact, after being open for thirty minutes, the herbs and bell pepper once again start to throw their weight around and the wine really becomes hard to drink. But, for a brief moment, the wine is not too bad, before collapsing again into vegetality. So glad today’s Loire reds are a far cry from wines such as this! 2015-2030. **68.**

Domaine Yannick Amirault (Bourgueil)

In 1977, Yannick Amirault started his own domaine with just under four hectares of vines that he inherited from his grandfather, as Yannick and his father, Eugene, could not agree on things such as the use of chemical fertilizers and herbicides in the family’s vineyards (which Yannick wanted to discontinue) or the style of wines to be produced, and father and son decided to go their separate ways and make their own wines. This was back in an era when a lot of Chinon and Bourgueil was produced from fairly generous yields, fermented and raised entirely in

stainless steel and made in a Beaujolais style for quick, early consumption, and Eugene Amirault was perfectly content with his solid client base for his style of Bourgueil. Once Yannick set up on his own in 1977 at the age of twenty-two, he settled into producing a more classic style of Bourgueil, with more structure and depth than what was currently in fashion in the region. Domaine Amirault grew in size in the 1990s, when Yannick was able to add several parcels of old vines (one in the superb vineyard of Le Grand Clos) which had been owned by two retiring vigneronns who had no family members interested in continuing farming the parcels. Around this time, he decided to take the plunge into fully organic viticulture, eschewing the use of any chemical products whatsoever in his vineyards, though it would not be until many years later that he and his son, Benoit, would seek to have their vineyards certified as organic. Eventually, after Yannick's father's passing, the domaine would grow to its present nineteen hectares of vines. Benoit Amirault joined his father full-time at the family domaine in 2003, after having spent the previous six years getting his degree in oenology and then working at one of the most important domaines in the region. Today, the estate exploits its nineteen hectares of vineyards, with thirteen of these situated in Bourgueil and six in the neighboring appellation of Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil; all of the vineyards have been certified organic by Ecocert since 2009, though as Monsieur Amirault likes to say, "the vines have not forgotten the previous twenty years of organic farming before their certification."



Benoit and Yannick Amirault in their vines in Bourgueil.

In the cellars, the grapes are one hundred percent de-stemmed and now fermented in open top wood vats (since 2009, prior to this their initial fermentation took place in stainless steel tanks), with typically four to six weeks of maceration time prior to the wine being racked off into

casks and demi-muids for their élevage. Over time, the Amiraults have sought to extract as gently as possible and this has been reflected in more elegant wines out of the blocks in the most recent vintages. However, the Domaine Amirault wines remain beautifully structured wines built for the cellar, rather than for early consumption. Yannick Amirault experimented with zero sulfur bottlings in the late 1990s and 2000 vintages, but he was not content with the results and the domaine has returned to using moderate SO₂ levels during the élevage and bottling. In the new millennium the domaine has also decided to bottle nearly all of their cuvées as single vineyard wines, so that they now offer three distinct bottlings from their vines in Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil: “la Source”, “la Mine” and “les Malgagnes”. La Source is a three hectare parcel that sits primarily on sandy soils, with the vine age thirty-five years of age. La Mine is a 1.5 hectare parcel of forty year-old vines that sits on a very gravelly terroir at the foot of the hillside vineyard of les Malgagnes, and this wine is always a bit more structured than La Source. The top single vineyard bottling for the Amiraults in Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil is their old vine bottling of les Malgagnes, which is planted with fifty year-old vines on yellow clay soils (these were the vines that Yannick’s father farmed until his passing). The family owns two hectares on the top of the hill here, with the old vines only producing twenty-five hectoliters per hectare and the resulting wine is the most tannic and structured of the Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil bottlings from Domaine Amirault and spends the longest time in cask prior to bottling.

From the AOC of Bourgueil, the Amiraults now produce four different cuvées: “la Coudraye”, “la Petite Cave”, “les Quartiers” and “le Grand Clos”. La Coudraye is their workhorse bottling of Bourgueil, and their only blended wine from the appellation, hailing from nearly five hectares of vines scattered amongst four different lieux à dits, with vines ranging from thirty to thirty-five years of age. The la Coudraye bottling is made of a blend of the three major soil types of Bourgueil- tuffeau, gravel and flint. Like the la Source bottling, la Coudraye only spends about eight months in older demi-muids prior to bottling and is the most forward cuvée in the range of Bourgueil bottlings from Yannick and Benoit Amirault. Les Quartiers is a single vineyard bottling, hailing from 1.5 hectares of forty-plus year-old vines on a terroir that is very, very chalky, so that this tends to be the most elegant of the Amirault Bourgueil cuvées. La Petite Cave is a 1.5 hectare parcel located closer to the river, near where the domaine has its cellars, and is planted with forty-five year-old vines on a soil base of stony clay and limestone. This wine is usually one of the shortest-cropped in the lineup as well, with yields typically around thirty hectoliters per hectare. The top of the line Bourgueil from the Amiraults is their le Grand Clos, where the family has two hectares of fifty year-old vines. As is the case with the old vines in les Malgagnes in Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil, the yields here are only twenty-five hectoliters per hectare, with the wine raised today entirely in four hundred liter casks and spending twenty-four months in barrel prior to bottling.

Domaine Amirault is a producer whose wines I have liked very much for several years now, but find that in the most recent vintages, the father and son team are really hitting their stride in terms of capturing more elegance and refinement in each of their bottlings, without ever sacrificing their long-term potential to age gracefully in the cellar. In general, I find that their bottlings of Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil tend to be a bit broader-shouldered in personality and just a tad less refined than their comparable offerings from Bourgueil, with the single vineyard bottlings from each AOC being really built for the long haul and at their best now with ten to fifteen years’ worth of bottle age, whereas the La Mine and La Coudraye cuvées are crafted to be

accessible quite a bit sooner- though each of these seemingly also possesses the potential to age very well over a decade or more. In June of this year, I had a chance to taste a few older vintages of the Domaine Amirault wines here in New York, that the family and their US importer, Peter Weygandt, had graciously organized shipping from Bourgueil to the states for a nice retrospective tasting. The tasting certainly confirmed my impression that Domaine Amirault is one of the rising stars in the firmament of classic Loire Valley red wines, and these wines certainly deserve to be represented deeply in any well-stocked cellar these days.

Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil de Famille Amirault

2013 Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil “la Mine”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

2013 was not an easy vintage in the Loire, but the '13 la Mine has turned out very nicely from Yannick and Benoit Amirault. This is a lighter-bodied example that is drinking beautifully out of the blocks, but may well put on a bit of weight with bottle age. The pretty and fairly red fruity nose wafts from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, fresh herb tones, a hint of tree bark, cigar wrapper and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and forward in personality, with nice nascent complexity, sound acids, just a bit of tannin and a long, vibrant and classy finish. A very tasty middleweight. 2015-2025+. **89.**

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 forty 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.**

2005 Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil “les Malgagnes”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

Not surprisingly, these fifty year-old vines, clay soils and the concentrated 2005 vintage have conspired to craft a deep and structured example of les Malgagnes that will be outstanding with sufficient bottle age, but is still a bit too young for primetime drinking. The excellent nose offers up a pretty masculine mélange of dark berries, cassis, espresso, cigar smoke, a bit of new leather and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still plenty chewy, with a rock solid core, firm tannins and excellent length and grip on the finish. This seems likely to age into a superb wine of noble rusticity, as the grain on the tannins is not quite as refined as is the case in the 2005 Bourgueil “la Petite Cave”. But, this is going to be excellent in its own right with a bit more bottle age. 2023-2050+. **91+.**

Bourgueil de Famille Amirault

2013 Bourgueil “la Coudraye”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

The Amirault family's 2013 version of la Coudraye is a lovely bottle of young Bourgueil, wafting from the glass in a classic aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke, tree bark and espresso. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite forward stylistically, with a good, solid core, modest tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long,

balanced and nascently complex finish. Good juice and an excellent result in a challenging year. 2015-2025+. **89+**.

2012 Bourgueil “la Coudraye”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

The 2012 la Coudraye is another superb example of this bottling (which has been extremely consistent year in and year out since 2009), offering up a youthfully complex 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 Messieurs Amirault. 2016-2030+. **90**.

2012 Bourgueil “les Quartiers” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Yannick Amirault

The 2012 vintage of les Quartiers from the Amiraults is an excellent example of the vintage, with a bit of mid-palate sappiness that is quite rare in this year. The classic bouquet offers up a youthful blend of sweet dark berries, blackberry, a touch of cola, woodsmoke, chalky soil tones and a touch of dark chocolate in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very refined on the attack, with a lovely core of gently sappy fruit, excellent soil signature, modest tannins and a very long, complex and classy finish. This is very elegant out of the blocks and quite approachable today, but is still a young wine and will be even better with a couple years in the cellar. A fine, fine result in 2012. 2015-2035. **91+**.

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. The Amiraults’ 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 Bourgueil “la Petite Cave”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

The 2011 la Petite Cave is a beautiful young wine, offering up superb depth and nascent complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy blend of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones, a touch of tobacco leaf and a nice touch of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a great core, ripe tannins and superb length and grip on the still fairly tightly-knit finish. This will need another good four or five years to really start to blossom, but it will be outstanding and should drink well for several decades, once it has a chance to open up with bottle age. 2020-2050. **93**.

2009 Bourgueil “la Petite Cave”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

Not surprisingly, the 2009 vintage of la Petite Cave is a bigger and “meatier” expression of the vineyard than the lovely 2011 version. The bouquet is deep and quite powerful in profile, offering up notes of dark berries, black cherries, roasted game, cigar ash, a bit of tariness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still plenty young, with a fine core, sturdy tannins and excellent length and grip on the well-balanced and very promising

finish. At its apogee, I suspect the 2009 will not be able to quite deliver the same degree of elegance as the lovely 2011, but it will be a bigger wine and will have its own share of staunch supporters, as it is very well-made. 2022-2060. **92.**

2005 Bourgueil “la Petite Cave”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

Like the '05 vintage in Bordeaux, Loire Valley reds from this year are wines of enormous potential, but also very serious structures and will need a long time in the cellar to fully blossom. The Amiraults' '05 la Petite Cave offers up lovely potential in its youthful aromatic constellation of black cherries, gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke, a bit of charred wood and espresso. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with plenty of tannic structure, lovely focus and balance and a very long, youthful and vibrant finish. All this excellent wine needs is more time in the cellar to allow its tannins to start to soften up a bit. 2023-2075. **93+.**

2003 Bourgueil “la Petite Cave”- Domaine Yannick Amirault

The 2003 la Petite Cave, which is from the first year where Benoit Amirault joined his father full-time at the domaine, is a very fine example of this torrid vintage. The bouquet offers up a maturing blend of cigar ash, dark berries, gravelly soil tones, espresso, a bit of hung game, herbs and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very smoky in personality, with a plush core, melting tannins and fine length and grip on the slightly roasted, but complex finish. I already like how this wine is drinking today, but it has plenty of life ahead of it and it is still very early days for the '03 la Petite Cave. It is not quite as refined as vintages such as 2011 or 2005, but it is a very good example of this fine *terroir*. 2015-2035. **91.**

Bourgueil and St. Nicolas de Bourgueil

2014 Bourgueil “Jour de Soif”- Domaine du Bel Air (Pierre Gauthier)

The Jour de Soif (Thirsty Day) bottling from Pierre Gauthier is really a beautiful bottle of Bourgueil designed to be very, very easy to drink out of the blocks, and the 2014 most assuredly is just that! The pure and vibrant nose jumps right out of the glass in a blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of dark chocolate, gentle notes of cigar smoke and an impressively complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and sappy at the core, with a fine signature of soil, just a whisper of tannin and a long, complex and bouncy finish. This is flat out delicious at the present time, but with the balance to age nicely for the next decade. An absolute bargain. 2015-2025. **91.**

2012 Bourgueil “Cuvée Domaine”- Domaine Stéphane Guion

Stéphane Guion has been in charge of this family domaine since 1994. It was first created by his grandfather in the 1950s and was one of the very first in the Loire to practice organic farming, which the Guion family began all the way back in the mid-1960s. There are only two bottlings produced here: the “Cuvée Domaine” and a “Cuvée Prestige” from the oldest vines found in their seven hectares of vineyards. Only indigenous yeasts are used for the fermentation and the wines are bottled with a low level of SO₂. The 2012 Cuvée Domaine is excellent, wafting from the glass in sweet dark berries, tree bark, superb soil tones, a bit of chicory, a lovely touch of botanicals and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately tannic, with a fine core, excellent complexity and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced and very classy finish. This is already quite tasty, but it will be even better with a few years in the cellar to allow the tannins to back off more completely and the secondary layers to start to emerge. Fine, fine juice. 2017-2035. **92.**

2010 Bourgueil “Grand Mont”- Domaine du Bel Air (Pierre Gauthier)

The 2010 vintage of Grand Mont from Pierre Gauthier is a superb follow-up to the outstanding 2009 crafted here, offering up a very elegant aromatic and flavor profile, refined tannins and impeccable balance for long-term aging. The exceptional nose delivers a nascently complex blend of black cherries, cassis, cigar wrapper, dark gravelly soil tones, smoke and a deft framing of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with a superb core, excellent soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex finish. Pierre Gauthier’s Grand Mont bottling really seems to be Bourgueil’s version of Clos Rougeard. 2020-2050. **94.**

2009 Bourgueil “Cuvée Prestige”- Domaine des Chesnaies (Lamé-Delisle-Boucard)

It has been a couple of years since I last reported on the 2009 Cuvée Prestige from Domaine des Chesnaies and the wine is really drinking with generosity today, though still with plenty of life ahead of it. The deep and very refined nose wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, cassis, new leather, cigar smoke, a touch of tree bark and a lovely base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and gently tannic, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature and very good length and grip on the focused and very well-balanced finish. Fine juice that will continue to improve with further bottle age, but is really extremely easy to drink at the present time. This remains one of the greatest red wine values to be found in the world of wine! 2015-2030+. **93+.**



Chinon

2014 Chinon “les Granges”- Domaine Bernard Baudry

The 2014 bottling of les Grands from the Baudry family is a superb young bottle of Chinon. The bouquet is deep, pure and still fairly primary, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, sweet cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, gentle notes of tree bark and a lovely topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows a nice touch of sappiness at the core, with fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, focused and very well-balanced finish. This is certainly approachable today, but it is still a young wine and I would tuck it away in the cellar for a year or two to allow its tannins to fall away a bit more and the secondary layers of complexity to emerge. Lovely wine. 2017-2035+. **91.**

2014 Chinon “Rive Gauche”- Château de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)

The 2014 Rive Gauche bottling from Marc Plouzeau is an excellent bottle of Chinon, with the depth and generosity of pure fruit that is the hallmark of this vintage, and which makes the wine very delightful for early drinking, but it has the balance and underlying structure to also age very well. The bouquet is deep and classic, offering up scents of sweet cassis, black cherries, tree bark, cigar wrapper and a fine base of gravelly soil tones. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with moderate, ripe tannins, good acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and very well-balanced finish. For my palate, I would tuck this away in the cellar for a few years and allow its secondary layers of complexity, but I can fully understand those who may choose to drink the wine today, as it is very tasty. 2017-3035. **90.**

2014 Chinon “les Lisons”- Domaine de la Croix Marie (Marc Plouzeau)

Marc Plouzeau has resurrected the Domaine de la Croix Marie starting with the 2014 vintage, and will be producing three different single vineyard wines from the estate in the years to come. The 2014 Chinon “les Lisons” hails from one of these parcels, with soils that are argilo-calcaire, and the wine delivers a fine and very elegant aromatic constellation of dark berries, cigar smoke, a complex base of *tuffeau* soil tones, a hint of tree bark and just a whisper of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very refined on the attack, with an excellent core, tangy acids, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the beautifully focused and high class finish. I cannot wait to taste the other two single vineyard bottlings that Monsieur Plouzeau is planning to produce from the twelve hectares of vines that make up the Domaine de la Croix Marie. 2015-2035. **92.**

2014 Chinon “La Vigne en Véron”- Chais Saint Laurent

The 2014 Chinon “La Vigne en Véron” from Chais Saint Laurent is a very pleasant, forward style of Chinon produced for early appeal, which it has in abundance in the fine 2014 vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classic blend of black cherries, a touch of tree bark, gentle smokiness, gravelly soil and a bit of cigar ash in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fairly deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core, moderate tannins and really quite reasonable length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. This is not made for the long haul and is already quite tasty, but there is little doubt the 2014 vintage has provided the stuffing to allow this fine value of Chinon to age gracefully for fifteen years or more. Good juice. 2015-2030+. **88+.**

2014 Chinon “Messanges Rouge”- Domaine de Pallus

The 2014 Messanges Rouges bottling of Chinon from the Sourdais family is excellent, offering up a deep, pure and quite classic bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, a touch of menthol, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and a bit of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate

the wine is full-bodied, focused and has a good, respectable core of fruit, with fine soil inflection, tangy acids, modest tannins and excellent length and grip. This is made for early drinking and is indeed, quite tasty out of the blocks, but it is very well-balanced and should have no difficulties cruising along nicely for a decade or more. 2015-2025. **89.**

2013 Chinon “les Barnabés”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The Chinon “les Barnabés” from Domaine Olga Raffault is a single vineyard bottling that hails from sandier soils and spends a shorter *elevage* in old *foudres*, so it is more approachable out of the blocks than their Les Picasses cuvée. The 2013 les Barnabés is a lovely wine, wafting from the glass in a black fruity in nascently complex aromatic blend cassis, dark berries, tree bark, cigar smoke, a nice touch of soil, currant leaf and a bit of chestnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and nicely balanced, with a solid core, modest tannins, fine balance and lovely length and grip on the open and already fairly complex finish. This does not have the depth or potential longevity of the superb les Picasses bottling from the domaine, but this is very, very good Chinon for relatively near-term drinking and has the underlying chassis to also age quite a while. Fine juice. 2015-2035. **89+.**

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

The Chinon “Chapelle” from Marc Plouzeau’s Château de la Bonnelière is aged in older *demi-muids* prior to bottling. The 2012 version is outstanding, offering up a very fine bouquet of cassis, a touch of roasted game, dark soil tones, cigar ash, a hint of tree bark and a topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and nicely focused finish. This does not have the same sense of sappiness at the core as a 2014, but it has excellent stuffing and structure for a 2012 and is a very strong bottle of Chinon. 2015-2030+. **91.**

2012 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Jean-Maurice Raffault

Rodolphe Raffault took over the reins of this fifty hectare family domaine from his father, Jean-Maurice in 1997. The family is the largest landowner in the fine vineyard of les Picasses, as they own six hectares out of the fifteen that comprises the vineyard. Their vines average forty years of age and are raised in three to ten year-old barrels, with the malo taking place in cask. Monsieur Raffault’s 2012 les Picasses is outstanding, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of cassis, black cherries, tree bark, a touch of fresh herbs, a superb base of soil, tobacco leaf and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely textural generosity on the attack (from malo in older barrel?), firm, ripe tannins, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, impeccably balanced finish. This is an outstanding bottle of young Chinon, but the wine deserves some time in the cellar to blossom. 2018-2040+. **93.**

2010 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The 2010 vintage of les Picasses from Domaine Olga Raffault is excellent and very classic in profile, with plenty of dark fruit, smoky, tree bark elements and a fine base of soil. The bouquet is still fairly youthful in its constellation of cassis, tree bark, a bit of tariness, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, a bit of roasted game and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and primary, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, soil-driven and still quite youthful finish. This is going to be excellent, but I would still give it another five years in the cellar to start to stir. 2020-2050+. **93.**

2009 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The 2009 les Picasses from the Raffault family is riper than the 2010, with more mid-palate *gras* and sappiness, but it too is still a properly youthful bottle of Chinon and deserves more bottle age. The excellent nose delivers a fine constellation of black cherries, dark berries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, espresso and a touch of tobacco leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with plenty of gravelly soil tones, firm, ripe tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very long, still quite primary finish. Tasting the 2009 les Picasses, it is very easy to see that the wines here have gotten more elegant in the last several vintages, without sacrificing any stuffing. Fine juice. 2020-2050+. **93+**.

2007 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault

At age eight, the 2007 Domaine Raffault les Picasses is really starting to drink well, with secondary layers of complexity now evident on both the nose and palate. The first class bouquet delivers scents of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, tree bark, gravelly soil tones, game, hints of road tar and a just a touch of coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and starting to drink very well, with a fine core, still a bit of tannin to resolve, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and classic finish. This will continue to improve with further bottle age, but it is really a lovely drink right now. 2015-2035. **92**.

2004 Chinon “les Picasses”- Catherine et Pierre Breton

I have always liked the classically proportioned 2004 reds from the Loire Valley and the '04 Picasses from the Breton family is really starting to show well at age eleven, though I would suspect that another five or six years' worth of bottle age will still be necessary for the wine to truly reach its apogee of peak drinkability. The bouquet is really superb today, jumping from the glass in a blend of sweet cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, gravel, espresso and a deft touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a fine core, lovely soil signature and still a fair bit of ripe tannin perking up the long, balanced and classy finish. With decanting, this wine is certainly approachable today, but I cannot see the logic of not holding off for a few more years and really allowing the wine's remaining tannins to melt away more fully. It is a beautiful bottle of Chinon in the making. 2020-2050. **93**.

2002 Chinon “les Picasses”- Domaine Olga Raffault

The 2002 Chinon “les Picasses” from Domaine Raffault is really a beautiful bottle that is now just entering its plateau of peak drinkability at age thirteen and offering up superb complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is deep and focused, wafting from the glass in a classic blend of cassis, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, a hint of grilled meat, tobacco leaf and a bit of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and exquisitely detailed, with a fine core, moderate tannin and a long, balanced and complex finish. 2002 is not a blockbuster vintage *chez* Raffault, but the '02 les Picasses is an utterly complete example of Chinon and I expect no one is going to be disappointed because it does not have quite the stuffing of the '89 or '90. This wine will continue to improve for at least another decade and drink well for another thirty years. Excellent juice. 2015-2045. **93**.

Montlouis

2014 Montlouis “Les Dix Arpents”- Domaine de la Taille aux Loups (Jacky Blot)

The Les Dix Arpents bottling from Jacky Blot is his Sec Montlouis and the wine is excellent in the fine vintage of 2014. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthfully complex and vibrant mélange of quince, chalky soil tones, orange zest, lanolin and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, nascently complex and quite accessible structurally, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, bright acids and very good length and grip. This is lovely wine and really augurs well for the other 2014s that Monsieur Blot will release in the coming months. 2015-2035+. **92.**

2013 Montlouis “Remus Plus”- Domaine de la Taille aux Loups (Jacky Blot)

The Remus Plus bottling from Jacky Blot hails from the oldest vines on his estate, with the average age here in excess of eighty years of age and the oldest over the century mark. The wine sees one-third new oak during its *élevage*, and the 2013 offers up a lovely nose of quince, orange zest, beeswax, complex soil tones, a bit of wet wool and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a moderate core, fine focus and grip and a long, wide open finish. There was quite a bit of hail in the vineyards of Montlouis in 2013, and I assume that this wine is a bit more forward in personality as a result. It is drinking with great class and nascent complexity, but due to the vintage’s characteristics in Montlouis, this seems likely to be a fairly short-lived wines by Monsieur Blot’s high standards. 2015-2020+? **89.**

2014 Montlouis “les Choissilles”- Domaine François Chidaine

The 2014 les Choissilles from François Chidaine is a Sec bottling, though this no longer appears on the front label, but is incorporated into a lovely graph of the various domaine bottlings and where they fall on the residual sweetness scale on the back label. The wine is breathtakingly beautiful, soaring from the glass in a deep, vibrant and utterly refined nose of pineapple, sweet quince, chalky soil tones, a dollop of lanolin, tropical fruit blossoms and incipient notes of bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and exquisitely balanced, with a superb core of fruit, brisk, perfectly integrated acids and stunning length and grip on the complex and electric finish. This is an utterly brilliant young wine! 2015-2050. **95+.**

2014 Montlouis “Clos de Breuil”- Domaine François Chidaine

François Chidaine’s Clos de Breuil bottling is always a bit exotic in a lineup of other Montlouis cuvées, as this vineyard’s flint soils (like Pouilly-Fumé) give the wine a very unique personality. The 2014 is another absolutely stellar wine, delivering a complex and vibrant nose of quince, apple, orange zest, gorgeously refined silex soil tones, a hint of rhubarb, citrus peel and a discreet topnote of the lanolin to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and far more reserved in personality than the les Choissilles, with a superb core, laser-like focus, bright acids and absolutely superb length and grip on the seamless and racy finish. This needs a few years to blossom more fully, but it has the depth and inherent complexity to give the magical 2014 les Choissilles a run for its money when it finally starts to hit on all cylinders. But, it deserves a couple of years to do so. 2017-2050. **94+.**

1997 Montlouis “Cuvée des Loups” Moelleux- Domaine de la Taille aux Loups (Jacky Blot)

Jacky Blot’s 1997 Cuvée des Loups is a lovely wine that has now reached full maturity and is a bit more dynamic on the palate than on the nose at the present time. The bouquet is plenty deep and complex, but seems a bit muted in its expressiveness for a Moelleux, offering up notes of yellow plum, apricot, honeycomb, orange peel and chalky soil. On the palate the wine is

much more vibrant, with its full-bodied format offering fine mid-palate depth, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Good juice with years and years of life still ahead of it. 2015-2040. **93.**

1996 Montlouis “les Batisses” Demi-Sec- Domaine Deletang

The 1996 les Batisses Demi-Sec from Domaine Deletang is a lovely bottle of Montlouis that has now reached its apogee, but will continue to drink with style and grace for another couple of decades. The pure and complex nose wafts from the glass in a mature blend of fresh apricot, sweet quince, honey, chalky soil tones, just a touch of wool and a topnote of fruit skin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite vibrant, with a good core, bright acids and fine length and grip on the bouncy and *à point* finish. 2015-2035. **92+.**

1996 Montlouis “Remus”- Domaine de la Taille aux Loups (Jacky Blot)

The 1996 Montlouis “Remus” bottling from Jacky Blot is a very pretty wine that offers up lovely complexity on both the nose and palate and is drinking with plenty of style at age nineteen. The nose is a lovely mélange of honey, peach, chalky soil tones, quince and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and absolutely *à point* at the present time, with good acids and very good length and grip on the focused and well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2015-2030+. **92.**

Sparkling Vouvray

François Chidaine Vouvray Pétillant Brut NV

François Chidaine’s bottling of Vouvray Pétillant (which may be the last he produces for some time under this label, given the stupidity of the Vouvray growers’ association in blocking his ability to use his cellars in Montlouis to produce his bottlings of Vouvray) is really excellent on both the nose and palate, with a sense of refinement that is not always apparent in young examples of sparkling Vouvray. The lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of lemon, a touch of bread dough, quinine, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and bone dry (clearly Extra Brut level sweetness at most), with a fine core, very elegant *mousse*, and fine length and grip on the still very youthful finish. This could use a couple of years’ worth of bottle age to really blossom, but will age very well and will be well worth tucking away in the cellar and letting it blossom completely. 2017-2030. **89.**

Bernard Fouquet Vouvray Pétillant “Méthode Traditionelle” Brut NV

Bernard Fouquet’s non-vintage bottling of Vouvray Pétillant is young and vibrant wine that delivers plenty of vivacity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is still fairly primary and still shows a touch of chenin’s youthful dustiness in its aromatic blend of apple, a dollop of orange peel, chalk dust and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely balanced, with a good, solid core, frothy *mousse* and sneaky length and grip on the racy finish. This is quite tasty and will age gracefully. I would not hesitate tucking it away in the cellar for a year or two and let that bit of chenin dust settle. 2015-2025+. **87+.**

Bernard Fouquet Vouvray Pétillant “Méthode Traditionelle” Brut NV

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tucking it away in the cellar for a year or two and let that bit of chenin dust settle. 2015-2025+. **87+**.

Bernard Fouquet Vouvray Pétillant “Méthode Traditionnelle” Brut NV

Bernard Fouquet’s non-vintage bottling of Vouvray Pétillant is young and vibrant wine that delivers plenty of vivacity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is still fairly primary and still shows a touch of chenin’s youthful dustiness in its aromatic blend of apple, a dollop of orange peel, chalk dust and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely balanced, with a good, solid core, frothy *mousse* and sneaky length and grip on the racy finish. This is quite tasty and will age gracefully. I would not hesitate tucking it away in the cellar for a year or two and let that bit of chenin dust settle. 2015-2025+. **87+**.

François Pinon Vouvray Pétillant Brut NV

The current release of François Pinon’s non-vintage Vouvray Pétillant is excellent and shows a nice touch of evolutionary complexity on both the nose and palate. I am not sure if this is a bit of reserve wine blended in, or if the wine has simply been given a longer time aging on its fine lees in the cellar, but it has a nice touch of maturity in its bouquet of apple, quince, a bit of wet wool, just a whisper of honeycomb and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still has a brisk girdle of acidity, with fairly pinpoint bubbles, good focus and grip and a moderately long, complex and still fairly youthful finish. This is a good example. 2015-2025. **88**.

François Pinon Vouvray Pétillant Brut “Non-Dosé” NV

The François Pinon Vouvray Pétillant “Non-Dosé” states that the wine is Brut on the label, but I imagine that this is actually Brut Nature. The wine is lovely and, like the non-vintage Brut bottling, shows a nice layer of secondary complexity from a bit of older wine in the blend. The bouquet is a mix of apple, quince, chalk, smoke and a bit of bread dough in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely complex, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the focused finish. Good juice, and I have to give this the nod by a half step over the straight non-vintage Brut bottling. 2015-2025. **89**.

1995 Domaine Foreau Vouvray Pétillant “Réserve” Brut

The 1995 Domaine Foreau Vouvray Pétillant “Réserve” is a good solid wine, but it quite broad-shouldered and rather monolithic at the present time, and I am torn whether to assume this is its permanent personality or still on the young side and unevolved. On the one hand, there is already and overtly oxidative strain running through the nose, but on the other, the palate remains, fresh, brisk and quite frothy. The bouquet is a mix of fallen apples, baked quince, a nice base of soil tones, a note of wet wool and a bit of new leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and far fresher in personality than the nose, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and fine length and grip on the still slightly chunky finish. The bottle had been bought on release and the quite knowledgeable owner felt it was quite representative of the wine (and was very fond of it), so one has to assume that this is a proper reflection of its state of evolution today. So, should one trust the palate or the aromatic evolution of the wine when gauging its future? Interesting and slightly perplexing juice. 2015-2025? **86-88?**

1995 Domaine Huët Vouvray Pétillant Brut

In contrast to the 1995 Foreau Pétillant, the bottle of Domaine Huët’s version was deemed a bit advanced by its owner, who insisted that he has had many fresher bottles in the recent past. I defer to his experience and only include the note here for its contrast to the Foreau version, as this wine has a degree of elegance, lightness of step and precision on the palate that is

not found anywhere in the 1995 Foreau Pétillant. A pristine bottle of this would be a great delight to drink and would dance rings around the far more leaden-footed bottling of Foreau.



Vouvray

2014 Vouvray “Le Petit Clos” Sec- Domaine des Aubuisières (Bernard Fouquet)

The 2014 Le Petit Clos Sec from Bernard Fouquet is an excellent wine that I was very, very happy to see was bottled under natural cork this year. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of fresh pineapple, quince, a touch of lanolin, chalky soil tones, citrus peel and a nice topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with a good core, fine focus and bounce and a long, youthful and promising finish. Structurally, this wine is certainly accessible today, but it is still very primary and has yet to blossom and show some of its additional layers of complexity, which hover in the background at the present time, and I would be inclined to give this a year or two in the cellar to allow it to really start to show all of its potential. A very pretty wine in the making. 2017-2030+. **89.**

2014 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Sec- Domaine Huët

Domaine Huët’s 2014 Le Haut Lieu Sec is a simply superb wine in the making, with depth, nascent complexity on both the nose and palate and lovely intensity of flavor on the backend. The bouquet shows depth and dimension in its blend of apple, quince, lanolin, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, spring flowers and orange zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off lovely concentration at the core, with outstanding soil signature,

bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long, open, but primary finish. I really like the structure of this wine, which is not as racy as it might have been if the autumn of 2014 had not tumbled into rain, but which allows the wine to really drink well out of the blocks, despite its still quite adolescent profile. Lovely juice. 2015-2040. **92+**.

2014 Vouvray “Le Mont” Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2014 Le Mont Sec from Domaine Huët also shows a slightly forward structural personality, as is the case with the Le Haut Lieu Sec in this vintage, but here, the greater perception of minerality inherent in the vineyard produces more backend grip and drive. The bouquet is primary and very promising, wafting from the glass in a blend of quince, a touch of lemon blossoms, chalky minerality, lanolin, hints of the smokiness to come with further bottle age and a topnote of citrus oils. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, superb mineral drive, nascent complexity and a very long, crisp and energetic finish. One can sense here that without the rains just prior to harvest, this would have been a legendary vintage, but the Le Mont Sec has turned out marvelously well in this vintage and is not going to disappoint any fan of the domaine. And one must keep in mind that it is vintages like 2014 that drink well sooner, whereas more structured years like 2005 take forever and a day to really come around! 2015-2045. **93+**.

2014 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2014 Clos du Bourg Sec from Domaine Huët is another outstanding example of the vintage, with the year’s early structural accessibility quite evident, but also with the depth and balance to age very long and gracefully as well. The nose is still fairly unevolved, but pure and promising in its constellation of quince, apple, grapefruit, complex minerality, lanolin and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very promising, with a lovely core, great layering of ripe fruit and soil, bright acids and a very long, open and primary finish. A beautiful wine in the making. 2017-2045. **94**.

2014 Vouvray “Le Mont” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

It is my impression that the Demi-Sec bottlings from Domaine Huët in 2014 were made from picking passes through the vineyards before the rains started to really blow, as there is more cut and structural sizzle here on the backend than in the very fine range of Sec bottlings. The 2014 Le Mont Demi-Sec delivers a stellar nose of sweet quince, a bit of white peach, bee pollen, chalky minerality, lanolin, white flowers and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, bright acids and a very long, youthful and nascently complex finish. I love the backend energy here. This is very, very easy to drink right now, but its true apogee is a decade down the road. 2015-2060+. **94+**.

2014 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2014 Domaine Huët Demi-Sec from the Clos du Bourg is a beautiful young wine, wafting from the glass in a very deep and youthfully complex constellation of apple, quince, a touch of papaya, bee pollen, beautiful soil tones, a touch of spring flowers and lanolin. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, crisp acids and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced and intensely flavored finish. This is a classic vintage of Clos du Bourg Demi-Sec in the making. My gut feeling is that this will close down fairly quickly and not emerge for four or five years, after which it should cruise along beautifully for three or four decades. 2020-2060+. **94+**.

2014 Vouvray “Silex Noir”- Domaine François Pinon

The 2014 Silex Noir from Domaine François Pinon is a very pretty, youthful wine. The bouquet is still a bit reticent, but blossoms with some encouragement to show shades of quince, apple, chalky soils (despite the vineyards possessing plenty of flint), a touch of wet wool and a gentle topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a good core, lovely soil signature and good bounce and grip on the long and promising finish. This is of course quite approachable today, but it is still on the primary side and will be decidedly more complex in the years to come. Fine juice. 2015-2035+. **92.**

2014 Vouvray “les Trois Argiles”- Domaine François Pinon

The Vouvray “les Trois Argiles” from the Pinon family was formerly known as “Cuvée Tradition” and hails from a vineyard with plenty of clay in the soil. The 2014 offers up a fine and quite youthful nose of quince, plenty of wet wool, deep soil tones, incipient notes of honeycomb and quite a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit more accessible out of the blocks than the nose insinuates, with a fine core, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex finish. Good juice, finished in a style somewhere between Sec and Demi-Sec, but which will dry out a bit more with extended bottle age. 2015-2035+. **91+.**

2014 Vouvray “les Déronnières”- Domaine François Pinon

This is the first vintage for the les Déronnières bottling from Domaine Pinon, as the production from this vineyard used to be earmarked for the Silex Noir. Though the label does not note this, it was finished as a Demi-Sec and offers up a lovely, youthful nose of quince, apple, wet wool, beeswax, chalky soil tones and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still fairly adolescent, with a lovely core, a bit of chalk dustiness of young chenin, fine focus and grip, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Like so many of the Pinon bottlings, the 2014 les Déronnières is accessible today, but it is still youthfully simple and really deserves some bottle age to start to move beyond its primary stage. A lovely wine in the making. 2017-2035. **92+.**

1997 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Moelleux Premier Trie- Domaine Huët

I really like the 1997 Le Haut Lieu Premier Trie from Domaine Huët, but in this tasting, with the '97 Clos du Bourg and the '96 Le Mont Premier Tries in the same flight, this lovely wine placed a very distant third. The wine is now a golden amber color and offers up a beautifully glazed bouquet of apricot, orange, honey, clover, a fine base of soil tones and a bit of barley sugar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a lovely core, vibrant acids, impressive complexity and a very long, easy-going and elegant finish. This is just a touch laid back stylistically in comparison to the Clos du Bourg, whose superior structural integrity and grip takes the wine up an energy level. That said, the '97 Le Haut Lieu Premier Trie is still a very fine bottle! 2015-2060+. **93+.**

1997 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Moelleux Premier Trie- Domaine Huët

Noël Pinguet made absolutely brilliant wines in 1997, and the Clos du Bourg Premier Trie has to be one of the greatest examples of the vintage to be found on the Loire this year! Whereas the '97 Le Haut Lieu Premier Trie offers up a dreamy and easy-going structural style quite reminiscent of the meandering river that it overlooks, the '97 Clos du Bourg Premier Trie is a bolt of chenin lightning that dazzles with its precise and shimmering complexity. The stunning nose roars from the glass in a gorgeous blend of orange, sweet quince, a gloriously complex base of soil, honey, a touch of lavender and the first signs of the leather to come with further bottle

age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and laser-like, with a bottomless core, great balance and refinement and a very, very long, electric finish. A stunning, stunning wine! 2015-2075. **96.**

1997 Vouvray “Cuvée Tradition”- Domaine François Pinon

In contrast to the 1996 version (please see below), the 1997 Cuvée Tradition” from François Pinon is still a few years away from fully blossoming and really could use a bit more time in the cellar. The wine is quite deep and powerful in personality for a Pinon wine, offering up a youthful blend of apple, quince, wet wool, a superb base of chalky soil, a touch of straw and a fair bit of developing smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep and decidedly full-bodied for a Pinon wine, with a good core, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is going to be outstanding when it fully blossoms, and though it is hardly a bad drink today by any standards, I would still be inclined to give it another four or five years’ worth of bottle age and let it really reach its apogee. 2019-2045+. **94.**

1996 Vouvray Sec- Domaine Foreau

The 1996 Sec bottling from Domaine Foreau is still a tad on the youthful side and a few years from really blossoming, but it shows outstanding depth and nascent complexity and will be a broad-shouldered, powerfully-built example of Vouvray Sec for a long time to come. The bouquet offers up a still slightly adolescent blend of apple, orange peel, quince, smoke, a fine base of soil tones and some fruit skin tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and muscular in style, with a fine core, crisp acids and fine cut and grip on the long, youthful and lively finish. This drinkable today, but really could use at least another five years to more fully blossom. Good juice in a more forceful style than the 1996 Domaine Huët bottlings. 2020-2060. **93.**

1996 Vouvray Demi-Sec- Domaine Foreau

While I can very much respect the constituent components of the Domaine Foreau ’96 Vouvray Sec, the wine does not possess the same seamless beauty found in its Demi-Sec counterpart in this vintage. The ’96 Demi-Sec is outstanding, soaring from the glass in a complex and refined constellation of sweet quince, pineapple, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of wet wool and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, impressive cut and grip and a very long, vibrant and complex finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Demi-Sec. 2015-2050+. **94+.**

1996 Vouvray “Le Mont” Sec- Domaine Huët

The 1996 Vouvray “Le Mont” Sec from Domaine Huët is an absolutely stunning bottle of wine that is beginning to really drink magically, but which has decades and decades still ahead of it to further blossom. The bouquet offers up a maturing blend of fresh pineapple, lemon oil, lanolin, a gloriously complex base of soil tones and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly laser-like in its focus, with a rock solid core, superb transparency and precision and a very long, zesty and electric finish. A great, great bottle of wine. 2015-2060. **96.**

1996 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux Premier Trie- Domaine Huët

When one serves a wine immediately following the legend in the making ’97 Clos du Bourg Premier Trie, one’s expectations are a bit tempered. However, the ’96 Le Mont Premier Trie is an absolutely brilliant wine that had no problems following, and this may well ultimately rank as one of Noël Pinguet’s greatest masterpieces when the dust settles on his career fifty years down the road! A few of the tasters around the table commented that “the difference between the

1997s and this wine is that there was no Cuvée Constance produced in 1996 at the domaine, so all of the finest raw materials found their way into the Premier Trie bottlings” and there may well be a significant degree of truth in this assessment. However, one also has to note the inherent superiority of the 1996 vintage’s structural chassis *vis à vis* 1997, and this is also on display in great detail in this brilliant wine. The stunning and totally pure nose delivers a superb constellation of pineapple, lemon oil, tangerine, a touch of lanolin, a blazingly pure base of minerality and still a whisper of adolescent wet wool in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, laser-like in its focus, with a rock solid core, zesty acids and stunning length and grip on the utterly seamless, vibrant and gorgeously complex finish. It had been eight years since I last tasted this wine, and over that period the wine has shed its adolescent grumpiness and blossomed into a wine for the ages! Pure magic. 2020-2080+. **98.**

1996 Vouvray “Cuvée Tradition”- Domaine François Pinon

The 1996 Cuvée Tradition” from François Pinon is a really beautiful wine that perfectly captures his “lighter than air” style of Vouvray. The absolutely superb nose jumps from the glass in a blend of pineapple, tangerine, a beautiful base of chalky soil nuances, lanolin and a lovely smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and vibrant, with lovely intensity of flavor, impressive complexity and a very long, zesty finish. This has lovely precision and elegance and is now fully into its apogee of peak drinkability. 2015-2030+. **93.**



Noël Pinguet chatting in the Clos du Bourg vineyard back in November of 2007.

White Wines of the Touraine

2014 Le P'tit Blanc du Tue-Boeuf- Clos du Tue-Boeuf

The 2014 vintage of Le P'tit Blanc du Tue-Boeuf does not carry the Touraine AOC on the label, nor the vintage, and is listed simply as a Vin de France. I assume this wine was refused the AOC from *les officials*, who seem to enjoy doing this with the wines from the Puzelat brothers with some regularity. The wine is comprised entirely of sauvignon blanc and came in at eleven percent octane in 2014, offering up a musky and grassy bouquet of grapefruit, gooseberry, damp grass, orange peel and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, zesty acids and fine complexity on the long and vibrant finish. There is just a whisper of volatile acidity here somewhere on the backend (Asian fruit fly contribution?), but this wine has fine depth and plenty of personality and it should drink very well for at least the next couple of years. 2015-2018. **88.**

2014 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc- Clos de la Grange

The 2014 Sauvignon Blanc from the Clos de la Grange is a young and pretty example of this varietal, wafting from the glass in a vibrant bouquet of lime, gooseberry, damp grass, chalky soil tones and a touch of white pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and reasonably complex, with a good core, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the youthful finish. A very nice example of Touraine sauvignon blanc, but this is still tight when first opened and really benefits from a bit of air. 2015-2018. **88.**

2014 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc- Les Devants de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)

The 2014 Sauvignon Blanc from Marc Plouzeau is a very pretty, quite grassy example of the varietal. The bouquet wafts from the glass in an energetic blend of grapefruit, gooseberry, cut grass, chalky soil and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and tightly-knit, with solid depth at the core, brisk acids, fine soil signature and a long, grassy and still quite youthful finish. This wine will offer more generosity with a bit of bottle age, but shows good focus and grip and is quite tasty, albeit in the grassier side of sauvignon blanc. 2015-2018. **87+.**

2014 “Petit Le Mont” Sauvignon Blanc- Foucher-Lebrun

The 2014 “Petit Le Mont” bottling of sauvignon blanc from the vine Sancerre producer of Foucher-Lebrun hails from vineyards on the border between Touraine and Haut Poitu. The wine is bright and bouncy on both the nose and palate, offering up a fine nose of lemon, grapefruit, a good base of soil, a touch of petrol and a gentle topnote of cut grass. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with moderate complexity, but plenty of *gras*, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long finish. Good juice. 2015-2017. **87.**

2014 Melon de Bourgogne- Olivier Bonhomme

The 2014 Melon de Bourgogne from Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme, which I assume hails from vineyards in the Touraine, is really lovely, offering up a bright and engaging personality on both the nose and palate that does great credit to Muscadet. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of lemon, bread fruit, dried flowers, chalky soil tones, a touch of hay and gentle leesiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with a superb core, excellent focus and grip and a very long, zesty and well-balanced finish. Lovely juice. 2015-2019. **89.**

2014 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc- Olivier Bonhomme

The 2014 Sauvignon Blanc from Monsieur Bonhomme is quite musky in style, offering up a complex and energetic nose of tangerine, pineapple, a bit of chalkiness, damp grass and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit forceful in style, with brisk acids, good focus and grip and a long, not particularly subtle finish. Does this have a bit of botrytis in it? There is a lot of material here, but this is not particularly classic. 2015-2018. **86+?**

2013 “Silène” Blanc- Les Maisons Brûlées (Corinne et Paul Gillet)

The 2013 “Silène” Blanc from Les Maisons Brûlées is made entirely from sauvignon blanc and is raised in a range of vessels, including stainless steel tanks, old *demi-muids* and fiberglass vats. The 2013 version is 12.5 percent octane and offers up a musky, natural wine nose of orange blossoms, pineapple, a very discreet base of chalky soil tones, a bit of acetic acid and marinated citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bubbly with CO2 and a bit volatile, with a good core, plenty of acidity, but not a whole lot of varietal character of soil tones. I like most of Monsieur Gillet’s wines currently in the market, but this one strikes me as more form than substance. 2015-2016. **83.**

2010 Racines “l’Epicourchois”- Luc Percher

The cuvée Racines “l’Epicourchois” from Luc Percher is made entirely from Menu Pineau (or Arbois) and the wine comes in twelve percent octane in the 2010 vintage. The bouquet remains quite vibrant in its mélange of bread fruit, beeswax, stony soil tones, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, nicely developed and still has a bit of framing acidity, with a good core, fine transparency and very good length on the wide open and intensely flavored finish. There is not a ton of cut or grip here today, but the wine remains very fresh and is drinking quite well at the present time. 2015-2017. **88.**

1996 Touraine Azay-le-Rideau Demi-Sec- Robert Denis

Due to its very generous serving of sulfur at bottling, Robert Denis’ 1996 Demi-Sec seems likely to last another fifty years and is still fairly primary in profile on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is bright and very pretty, offering up notes of yellow fruit, citrus zest, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, beeswax and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and quite light on its feet, with a good core, fine focus and very good length and grip on the still nascently complex finish. I like this wine very much, but one has to wonder if it will ever really blossom into its secondary layers of complexity with this level of SO2 in the wine. 2015-2045+. **92.**

Côteaux du Loir**2014 L’Effraie Coteaux-du-Loir- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)**

As readers may recall, the L’Effraie bottling from Eric Nicolas is made up of some of his younger vines parcels in his Jasnières vineyards with a few plots of vines that fall just outside of the limits of the appellation, with none of these vines over fifty years of age, but not necessarily young vines. The inclusion of some chenin fruit from outside of Jasnières causes the cuvée to be classified as Coteaux-du-Loir. The 2014 shows the ripeness of a top vintage, coming in at fourteen percent alcohol (versus twelve percent for the 2013) and offers up a superb nose of apple, quince, complex chalky soil tones, citrus oil, a bit of lanolin and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, excellent length and a very promising, perfectly balanced finish. This is a puppy and really needs a couple of years in the cellar to start to show its secondary layers of complexity and should age very well indeed. 2017-2030+. **92+.**

2013 Vieilles Vignes Éparses Coteaux-du-Loir- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)

The 2013 Vieilles Vignes Éparses from Domaine de Bellivière is produced from vines that range from fifty to eighty years of age and are grown in the classic Coteaux-du-Loir soils of clay and flint over *tuffeau*. The 2013 Éparses is excellent, with a fine nose jumping from the

glass in a blend of quince, peach, a touch of honey, beautiful soil tones that show the flinty element in the *terroir*, lanolin and gentle floral scents in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, bright and quite wide open in personality, with fine focus and core, lovely acids and a very long, complex and extremely elegant finish. Another absolutely transcendental This will not make old bones, but it is drinking beautifully at the present time and will deliver a lovely glass of wine for at least the next five years. 2013. 2015-2020+. **90.**

Jasnières

2014 Jasnières “les Rosiers”- Domaine de Bellivière (Eric Nicolas)

The 2014 les Rosiers bottling of Jasnières from Eric Nicolas is also beautifully ripe, showing off the depth and structure for cellaring that this wine routinely has in top vintages, despite it also being from some of Monsieur Nicolas’ younger vines and crafted for early accessibility. The wine wafts from the glass in a mix of pineapple, sweet quince, a touch of honeycomb, wet wool, lovely soil tones and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with crisp acids, fine balance and a long, focused and still fairly youthful finish. The backend has that lovely interplay of sweet fruit and the inherent bitterness of young chenin blanc that already works very well at the table, but I would be inclined to give this at least another year’s worth of bottle age to really blossom more fully. 2016-2030. **92.**

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

The 2013 Jasnières “Calligramme” from Domaine de Bellivière, which is made all from vines in excess of fifty years of age, is a really pretty example of this challenging vintage, offering up an aromatic blend of apple, quince, a bit of wet wool, chalky soil tones, a nice blossoming base of honeycomb and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with crisp acids, a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a long, blossoming finish. This does not possess the same depth of fruit or vibrancy of the 2014 Rosiers, but it is already starting to show some nice secondary development and is truly an outstanding success for the vintage. 2015-2025. **89.**

Rosé Wines of the Touraine

2014 Vin Rosé- Clos du Tue-Boeuf

I love the color of the 2014 Vin Rosé from Clos du Tue-Boeuf, which is a vibrant cherry red. The wine is produced from two-thirds Côt and one-third Grolleau and the vintage produced a fairly ripe wine by the standards of Monsieur Puzelat these days, coming in at an even twelve percent alcohol. The wine delivers a charming bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, chalky soil tones, dried violets and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very tasty, with fairly low acids, a fine core and a long, succulent finish. This will want drinking up over the next year, but it will provide a very good glass of Rosé over the coming twelve months. 2015-2016. **87.**

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

2014 La Guerrierie Touraine Rouge- Clos de Tue-Boeuf

The 2014 La Guerrierie from Clos de Tue-Boeuf is its customary blend of seventy percent Côt and thirty percent Gamay, with the ripe vintage allowing this wine to reach fully twelve percent alcohol. It is a touch volatile on the nose when first poured and certainly benefits from some aeration, eventually offering up scents of cherries, blood orange, bonfire, a touch of fresh

thyme and a really lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and tangy, with a good core, lovely complexity and transparency and a long, slightly volatile, but intensely flavored finish. This has loads of personality, but not quite as much stability as one would like to see, and I wonder how it will evolve with bottle age. Those who are already converts to the natural wine movement will love this vintage of La Guerrerie from the Puzelat brothers, but for others, it may be a wee bit too volatile. I went back and forth on the wine, but ultimately enjoyed it, as its many positive attributes tip the scale in the positive direction in the end. 2015-2018+? **88.**

2014 Vin Rouge “Gamay”- Clos du Tue-Boeuf

The 2014 Vin Rouge bottling of Gamay from Clos du Tue-Boeuf is quite high-toned in style, which is not surprising, as it is only 11.5 percent alcohol. However, there is plenty of depth and intensity to be found here on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a bright and stylish blend of cherries, cranberries, charred wood, a touch of cola, a fine base of soil and a nice touch of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and focused, with a solid core of fruit, superb transparency, tangy acids and impeccable balance on the long and vibrant finish. This is one low fat example of the 2014 vintage that is rock solid structurally and absolutely delicious. I should mention that the *cépages* of Gamay appears on the back label. 2015-2020+. **90.**

2014 Ça C’Est Bon (Gamay)- Laurent Lebled

The 2014 Ça C’Est Bon bottling of Gamay from Laurent Lebled has a bit of dissolved CO2 in it at the present time, which keeps it bouncy on the palate, but also takes away a bit of textural elegance. The nose is a bright blend of red berries, fresh herb tones, a nice base of gently autumnal soil tones and a touch of cinnamon stick in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied (11.5 percent octane) and tangy, with a very modest core, good transparency and a long, vibrant and passably complex finish. In 2014, I would have loved to have seen a bit more ripeness here to give the wine a bit of mid-palate amplitude, but for high-toned early quaffing, it is admittedly, pretty tasty. 2015-2017. **87.**

2014 Poivre et Sel- Olivier Lemasson

I was a bit surprised to see that this bottling of Pinot d’Aunis from Olivier Lemasson is the same low octane level of eleven percent in both the strong 2014 vintage and the more difficult year of 2013, as I was expecting just a bit more ripeness in this more recent year. In any case, this is another very lovely middleweight, wafting from the glass in a juicy blend of cherries, bonfire, mustard seed, lovely autumnal soil tones, a touch of orange peel and a lovely spicy topnote redolent of cinnamon and saffron. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and intensely flavored, with moderate mid-palate depth, tangy acids and little tannin on the long and ever so slightly volatile finish. Good juice. 2015-2020. **89.**

2014 Touraine Pinot Noir- Puzelat-Bonhomme

The 2014 Pinot Noir from Puzelat-Bonhomme is a light and very pretty rendition of this varietal, offering up a complex nose of cherries, *fraises du bois*, autumnal soil tones, a touch of gamebird, woodsmoke and a potpourri of fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and high-toned, with a very modest core, nice soil inflection and intensity of flavor, tangy acids and just a whisper of tannin on the impressively long finish. This is lightweight pinot, coming in at 11.5 percent alcohol, but it has plenty of personality for those who do not need weight in their pinot noir. 2015-2020+. **88.**

2013 La Butte Touraine Rouge- Clos de Tue-Boeuf

The bottle of 2013 La Butte Gamay from the Puzelat brothers that I received this year was plenty reduced when first opened and really needed some decanting to blossom. However, once it has had a chance to blossom, the wine is drinking very well, with a decidedly more black fruity personality one year on than last year's bottle displayed. Today the wine offers up a bouquet of dark berries, coffee grounds, woodsmoke, that fine signature of soil, still that exotic touch of acorn and cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, focused, complex and nicely soil-driven, with last year's very modest tannins now pretty much history. The bright finish is fairly long, wide open and absolutely beautifully-balanced, with no rough edges and fine intensity of flavor. It is aging every bit as well as I might have hoped a year ago and remains an impressively tasty middleweight for near-term drinking. 2015-2018. **88.**

2013 Pollux "Gamay" (L7-13)- Eric Nicolas

The current release of Pollux from Eric Nicolas does not state the vintage on the label, just the lot number of "L7-13", but the cork is stamped 2013 and I am sure that the lot number refers to the vintage. This is one hundred percent gamay (though this does not appear on the label) and came in at a very slim eleven percent octane in the challenging 2013 vintage. The wine offers up an excellent complex nose of dark berries, campfire, dark soil tones, coffee grounds and a topnote of botanicals reminiscent of some of Emidio Pepe's vintages of Montepulciano. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, balanced and tangy, with a bit of backend tannin, very respectable mid-palate intensity and a very long, complex and vibrant finish. There is still just a very faint touch of dissolved CO2 on the palate here still, but the wine is flat out delicious to drink today and should easily keep eight to ten years. Impressive, particularly for a 2013! 2015-2023+. **90.**

2013 "R2L'O"- Les Maisons Brûlées (Corinne et Paul Gillet)

This name takes its name from the Herdeleau *lieu à dit* in which this field blend of Pineau d'Aunis, Gamay and Pinot Noir is grown. Monsieur Gillet bottles this wine without added SO2, after twelve months *elevage* in older barrels. The 2013 is twelve percent octane and offers up a bright and gently volatile nose of dark berries, charred wood, dark soil tones, botanicals and a touch of sarsaparilla in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, juicy and nicely soil-driven, with good complexity, respectable mid-palate depth and lovely length and grip on the bouncy finish. This wine has just a touch of acetic acid on the backend which keeps its score down a bit, and also shortens its projected window of drinkability, but there is plenty of personality in the glass here and for at least drinking over the next few years, there is plenty of pleasure to be had. 2015-2018+? **88.**

Red Wines of the Touraine- Primarily Côt and Cabernet Franc

2014 Vercheny- Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme

Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme ran this small *négociant* business with Thierry Puzelat for many years, but with Thierry's brother Jean-Marie retiring in 2014, Thierry is now devoting one hundred percent of his time to the family estate of Clos du Tue-Boeuf and Pierre-Olivier is now solely in charge of the *négociant* enterprise. The 2014 Vercheny from Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme is a one hundred percent pinot noir bottling from vines in the Cheverny appellation, but as Cheverny *rouge* requires a blend of pinot and gamay, the wine cannot be sold as Cheverny. The 2014 Vercheny offers up an excellent nose of wild strawberries, woodsmoke, gamebirds, forest floor and a gentle touch of cinnamon in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and tangy, with a solid core, fine complexity and a long, vibrant and light on its

feet finish. This is only 11.5 percent alcohol, but unlike some other reds at this octane level that I tasted for this report, there is no issue here with a lack of depth at the core here. A very good, lighter-styled pinot noir. 2015-2020+. **89.**

2014 Touraine Rouge- François Chidaine

The 2014 Touraine Rouge from François Chidaine is a blend of fifty percent Cabernet Franc, thirty-five percent Côt and fifteen percent Pineau d'Aunis, with all of the vineyards farmed under biodynamics and the grapes harvested solely by hand. The 2014 vintage has produced a nicely ripe wine, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offering up a fine nose of dark berries, charred wood, espresso, a fine signature of soil, cigar ash and a touch of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, succulent on the attack and really has a fine core, with a bit of backend tannin, good acids and excellent length and grip on the impressively complex finish. This is a great, great value and should drink nicely for at least a decade! 2015-2025. **90.**

2014 Côt à Côt- Noëlla Morantin

Noëlla Morantin's 2014 Côt à Côt is quite reduced when first opened and really needs a bit of time in decanter to blossom. However, once the wine has had some oxygen and gets a chance to blossom, it offers up a nascently complex and quite classic nose of dark berries, campfire, espresso, dark soil tones and a touch of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and a touch chewy, with a nice core, lovely soil signature, mounting complexity and fine length and grip on the modestly-tannic finish. I would give this a couple of years in the cellar to soften up more fully and start to show some of its secondary layers of complexity. Good juice (after decanting). 2017-2027. **89.**

2013 Èrèbe- Les Maisons Brûlées (Corinne et Paul Gillet)

The Èrèbe bottling from Les Maisons Brûlées is a blend of Côt and Cabernet Franc and is bottled without filtration or added SO₂ at bottling. The 2013 comes in at twelve percent octane and offers up a black fruity nose of cassis, blackberries, cigar ash, fine soil tones and a bit of French roast. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and bouncy, with moderate depth at the core, good intensity of flavor, just a bit of backend tannin and a gentle touch of spritz on the good, long finish. This is quite tasty for near-term drinking and couples a lot of personality with a lightness of step on the palate. 2015-2017. **88.**

2013 “Ko” In Côt We Trust”- Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme

The 2013 “In Côt We Trust” from Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme is another lighter-styled red from the 2013 vintage, tipping the scales at 11.5 percent alcohol. The wine delivers a complex and pretty nose of dark berries, charred wood, fallen leaves, a touch of game, a nice dollop of soil and a bit of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, high-toned and pretty discreetly endowed at the core, with a bit of CO₂ on the palate, modest tannins and a touch of volatile acidity poking out on the long and intensely flavored finish. This is okay, but it really cries out for a bit of mid-palate stuffing and a tad more stability on the backend. 2015-2018+? **87.**

2010 Grolleau “80”- Xavier Cailleau

The 2010 Grolleau “80” from Xavier Cailleau hails from a parcel of vines that was not affected by phylloxera and had originally been planted in the mid-nineteenth century. Sadly, the parcel was badly hailed in 1928 and had to be regenerated from *selection massale* cuttings in 1930, so Monsieur Cailleau now dates the age of the vineyard from that year. The wine is

fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks for ten months prior to bottling. The 2010 version is absolutely brilliant wine, wafting from the glass in a sappy aromatic constellation of black cherries, woodsmoke, beautiful *tuffeau* soil tones, raw almonds, a touch of balsam bough and tree bark and an old Chartreuse-like potpourri of discreet botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and sappy at the core, with superb transparency (as befits these venerable, *franc de pied* vines), great lightness of step, modest tannins and stellar length and grip on the perfectly balanced, nascently complex finish. This wine is only twelve percent alcohol and is incredibly lively and energetic as a result, but with the structure to also age long and gracefully. In reality, this is still a puppy that will benefit from some extended cellaring. However, it is so flat out gorgeous to drink today, that it is going to be a supreme challenge to one's self-control to leave this wine alone in the cellar for even a few years! A beautiful wine. 2017-2030+. **94+**.



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.

2014 Cheverny Blanc “le Petit Chambord” Vendanges Manuelles- Domaine François Cazin

The 2014 Cheverny Blanc from François Cazin is comprised of a blend of eighty percent sauvignon blanc and twenty percent chardonnay. The wine offers up a bright and youthful bouquet of grapefruit, gooseberry, fresh-cut grass, a fine base of *argilo-calcaire* soils, a touch of white pepper and currant leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. I like how this wine takes its personality on both the nose and palate from the sauvignon blanc, but with the chardonnay providing just a bit more stuffing in the mid-palate. Good juice that will be even better drinking a year down the road. 2015-2020+. **90.**

2013 Cour-Cheverny “le Petit Chambord” Vendanges Manuelles- Domaine François Cazin

The 2013 “Vendanges Manuelles” bottling of Cour-Cheverny from François Cazin is a very pretty bottle, but as predicted a year ago, it is a full point lower in alcohol than the fine 2012 version, tipping the scales at 11.5 percent. This has produced a rather delicately styled wine that is still bubbly with personality on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of green apple, a touch of wet wool, lime peel, wet stones and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and quite wide open, with a very respectable core, fine focus and grip and a long, soil-driven and impressively complex finish. This is a very pretty middleweight that is drinking very well out of the blocks, but should cruise along nicely for at least five to seven years. A very strong result from 2013. 2015-2020+. **89+.**

2013 Cheverny Blanc “Frileuse”- Le Clos du Tue Boeuf

The 2013 Cheverny “Frileuse” from Le Clos du Tue Boeuf is aging very nicely since I last saw a bottle a year ago and is now drinking at its apogee. The bright and complex bouquet offers up scents of lime, quince, a fine base of limestone soil tones, fresh-cut grass and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and now wide open in personality, with very respectable mid-palate depth, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and low fat finish. Fine juice. 2015-2020. **88.**

2013 Cheverny Blanc “l’Epicourchois”- Luc Percher

The 2013 Cheverny from Luc Percher is comprised of a blend of sixty percent Sauvignon Blanc and forty percent Menu Pineau, so it is a pretty rare bottling of Cheverny Blanc for not including any chardonnay in its *cépages*. The bouquet on the 2013 is deep and complex, delivering a fine blend of lime, tart pear, a whisper of cut grass, fine soil tones, citrus peel and hints of the honeycomb to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, bright, snappy acids and excellent focus and grip on the vibrant finish. Fine juice. 2015-2020+. **90.**

2013 Cour-Cheverny “l’Epicourchois”- Luc Percher

The Cour-Cheverny from Luc Percher is made from some of the oldest Romarantin vines in all of the Loire, as they are at least one hundred and ten years of age (their exact year of plantation predates official record keeping in the region). My bottle of the 2013 was decidedly reduced when first opened and needed some time in decanter to freshen up, but this it does pretty nicely with thirty minutes of aeration and then offers up a youthful and nascently complex

bouquet of lime peel, stony minerality, a touch of menthol and a topnote of resinous botanicals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and amazingly rock solid at the core for a 2013, with great mineral drive, brisk acids and laser-like focus on the very, very long and youthful finish. This is very early days for this old vine bottling of Romarantin, and a couple of years in the cellar will really pay dividends. If you decide to drink it now, make sure to plan ahead and decant it at least half an hour. 2017-2030+. **92.**

2010 Cour-Cheverny Moelleux “Cuvée Renaissance”- Domaine François Cazin

This is the first sweet example of Cour-Cheverny that I can recall tasting from François Cazin, and the wine is excellent. This cuvée is produced from the oldest Romarantin vines in the family vineyards, which range from fifty to eighty years of age, and then are harvested late to produce this bottling. Depending on the vintage, it can either be a Demi-Sec or Moelleux level of sweetness, as is the case with the lovely 2010 version. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of candied lime, fresh pineapple, beautiful soil tones, citrus blossoms and a touch of paraffin. On the palate the wine is pure and full-bodied, with beautifully snappy acids, magical depth at the core, great focus and balance and a very, very long, refined and complex finish. I have no experience drinking older Cour-Cheverny Moelleux, but based on the impeccable balance and fine structural chassis here, I can see no reason this wine will not last twenty or thirty years. There is a touch of young Vouvray-like chalk dustiness on the backend here, which further suggests that it will age long and gracefully. Gorgeous juice and a tremendous value! 2015-2040+? **93+.**

2009 Cour-Cheverny “le Petit Chambord” Vendanges Manuelles- Domaine François Cazin

The 2009 Cour-Cheverny from François Cazin has blossomed beautifully with six years of bottle age and is drinking brilliantly at the present time. The pure, vibrant and complex nose soars from the glass in a blaze of lime, a touch of menthol, beautiful chalky minerality, a bit of citrus oil, gentle notes of beeswax and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and gorgeously complex, with a superb core, impeccable focus and balance, fine framing acids and excellent mineral drive on the very long and classic finish. This is a simply superb bottle of Cour-Cheverny at its apogee. 2015-2025. **93.**

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.

2014 Cheverny Rouge “Rouillon”- Le Clos du Tue Boeuf

The 2014 Cheverny Rouge “Rouillon” from the Puzelat is a stylish and high-toned wine, as befits its *cépages* of fifty percent each of pinot noir and gamay and its octane level of twelve percent. The wine offers up a complex nose of dark berries, woodsmoke, a touch of orange peel, chicory, gentle spice tones and a bit of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, just a touch of tannin and a long, tangy and intensely flavored finish. The riper 2014 vintage has given this wine some lovely mid-

palate amplitude to go along with the customary precision and transparency of the bottling. A very fine middleweight. 2015-2025. **90.**

2013 Cheverny Rouge “l’Epicourchois”- Luc Percher

The 2013 Cheverny Rouge “l’Epicourchois” from Luc Percher is made from old vine parcels of gamay and pinot noir, which Monsieur Percher has farmed organically for several years and which were certified in 2013. The wine is twelve percent alcohol and just a touch reduced when first opened, but once given a bit of aeration, it delivers a fine, youthful nose of black cherries, cassis, lovely botanicals, just a hint of tree bark, espresso and incipient notes of forest floor. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and complex, with a good, solid core, excellent transparency, moderate tannins and a long, nascently complex and tangy finish. This is a serious bottle of Cheverny that needs a year or two in the cellar to really blossom and should age nicely for ten to fifteen years. Classy juice. 2017-2030. **91.**

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.

2014 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc- Clément et Florian Berthier

The “regular bottling” of Coteaux du Giennois Blanc from Clément et Florian Berthier is quite fine in 2014, delivering a classically musky and grassy sauvignon blanc nose of grapefruit, gooseberry, damp grass, flinty soil tones and white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, impressively full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, bright acids and lovely soil signature on the long, grassy and well-balanced finish. This is a fine bottle of sauvignon blanc with plenty of personality and stuffing and a really fine bargain for fans of this varietal’s grassier side. 2015-2018. **88.**

2014 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc “Terre de Silex”- Clément et Florian Berthier

The Terre de Silex from Clément et Florian Berthier hails from a small parcel of old vine sauvignon blanc that lies just outside of the appellation of Pouilly-Fumé. The 2014 version offers up a musky nose of lime peel, green apple, fresh cut grass, flinty soil tones and citrus blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and nicely grassy, with a good core, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the impressively complex finish. This tastes just like Pouilly-Fumé (as one would expect) and is really a lovely bottle and another stellar value from the Berthiers. 2015-2018. **88.**

2014 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc “Terre de Caillotte”- Clément et Florian Berthier

The Terre de Caillotte from Clément et Florian Berthier is produced from a parcel of vines that lies across the river from Sancerre. The small, chalky stones are one of the three defining *terroirs* of the Sancerre appellation, and fairly rare outside of the AOC. The 2014 Terre de Caillotte from the Berthiers delivers a bright and personality-infused bouquet of gooseberry, tart orange, damp grass, chalky minerality and a touch of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and broad-shouldered, with an excellent core of fruit, fine soil signature, crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the focused finish. Stylistically, this is a bit like Quincy in its more forceful profile, but most of Quincy is on primarily clay soils, so here, one gets a serious base of Sancerre chalkiness. This is not the most elegant rendition of Loire

sauvignon blanc, but there is a ton of complexity here and it really is a fine value. 2015-2018. **88+.**

2013 Coteaux du Giennois Rouge- Clément et Florian Berthier

As I noted last year, the 2013 Coteaux du Giennois Rouge from Clément et Florian Berthier is entirely pinot noir and the wine has opened up over the year since I last saw a bottle, as it now offers up a bright and wide open bouquet of cherries, woodsmoke, chalky soil tones, pepper, a touch of coffee grounds and dried herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and tangy, with a solid core, fine intensity of flavor, bright acids and good length and grip on the blossoming finish. These vineyards are right across the river from Sancerre and this wine has quite a bit of Sancerre *rouge* styling in its personality, albeit without quite the same heft on the palate. Good juice that is starting to drink well and will be even better with another year or two in the cellar. 2015-2025. **87.**

Quincy and Menetou-Salon

2014 Quincy- Domaine du Tremblay (Jean Tatin)

The 2014 Quincy from Jean Tatin is sealed with a plastic cork, so it will probably want to be drunk up on the early side, but I imagine that most folks are not thinking of aging their Quincy in any case. The wine is a classically pungent and extroverted example of sauvignon blanc, wafting from the glass in a mélange of fresh lime, grapefruit, citrus peel, lovely soil tones, a touch of beeswax and fresh-mown grass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, bright acids and fine length and grip on the focused and extroverted finish. Quincy is never the most elegant rendition of sauvignon blanc, but it often delivers plenty of personality by way of compensation, and this is certainly the case with the 2014 from Jean Tatin. 2015-2017. **89.**

2014 Quincy- Domaine de Villalin

The 2014 Quincy from Domaine de Villalin is really a lovely example of this appellation, with all of the exuberant sauvignon blanc character that Quincy is so well known for in evidence on both the nose and palate. The excellent bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of gooseberry, fresh cut grass, lime zest, lovely soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegantly styled for Quincy, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, very good complexity bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and very well-balanced finish. A really classic example of why top examples of Quincy are one of the finest white wine values to be found anywhere in the world! 2015-2018. **91.**

2014 Menetou-Salon- Domaine du Châtenoy (Isabelle et Pierre Clément)

The 2014 Menetou-Salon from Isabelle and Pierre Clément is a lovely and very elegant example of Menetou, as the chalky base of their vineyard soils given the wine excellent cut and notable refinement. The wine is currently quite tightly-knit and will be even better with six months or a year more in bottle, but shows outstanding promise in its classy bouquet of tart orange, lime, chalky minerality, fresh cut grass and orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and structured, with a rock solid core, great transparency, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is very, very serious Menetou, but it deserves a bit more bottle age just to let it blossom a bit more from behind its girdle of acidity and start to show all of its colors! 2016-2023+. **92.**

Pouilly-Fumé

2014 Pouilly-Fumé “les Pentes”- Domaine Serge Dagueneau et Filles

The 2014 les Pentes from Domaine Serge Dagueneau et Filles is a lovely and classic bottle of Pouilly-Fumé, wafting from the glass in an exuberant aromatic blend of lime, gooseberry, damp grass, a touch of melon, white flowers and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and quite wide open and succulent out of the blocks, with a fine core, vibrant acids, and fine focus and grip on the long and perfectly balanced finish. A lovely bottle of Pouilly-Fumé with plenty of upfront personality. 2015-2018. **91.**

2014 Pouilly-sur-Loire Chasselas “la Centenaire”- Domaine Serge Dagueneau et Filles

The Chasselas “la Centenaire” from the Dagueneau family is produced from a parcel that is over one hundred years of age. The grapes are hand-picked and fermented in stainless steel, with the wine bottled the following March after the harvest. The 2014 version offers up a beautiful bouquet of apple, melon, sweet nuttiness, a complex base of soil and a touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and impressively complex, with a superb core of fruit, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the soil-driven finish. Picture a high quality Pouilly-Fumé made from Chasselas, instead of Sauvignon Blanc. Fine juice. 2015-2019. **90.**

2014 Pouilly-Fumé- Domaine Clément et Florian Berthier

The 2014 Pouilly-Fumé from Clément et Florian Berthier, who also produce a lovely range of Coteaux de Giennois bottlings and several Sancerres as well, is outstanding. The bouquet delivers a superb aromatic constellation of lime, gooseberry, flinty minerality, freshly-mown grass and a potpourri of citrus blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, impeccable focus and a long, zesty and complex finish. This is simply a superb bottle of Pouilly-Fumé! 2015-2019. **92+.**

2014 Pouilly-Fumé- Domaine des Fins Caillottes (Jean Pabiot et Fils)

The 2014 Pouilly-Fumé from the Pabiot family is a beautiful example of its appellation in a top vintage. The wine jumps from the glass in a deep and complex blend of lime, pink grapefruit, flinty soil tones, fresh-cut grass, gentle smokiness and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and light on its feet, with an excellent core, fine complexity and a long, focused and beautifully balanced finish. Great juice. 2015-2020. **92.**

2013 Pouilly-Fumé “Clos des Chaudoux”- Domaine Serge Dagueneau et Filles

The 2013 Clos des Chaudoux from the Dagueneau family- Serge and his two daughters, Valerie and Florence, is a really superb bottle of Pouilly-Fumé, as their penchant for late harvesting seems to really have paid dividends in 2014. The pure and vibrant nose delivers scents of pink grapefruit, a touch of tangerine, petrol, flinty soil tones, citrus peel and a topnote of grassiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with a fine core, impressive complexity and good length and grip on the focused finish. A very strong result in 2013. 2015-2017. **90.**



Sancerre

2014 Sancerre “Terroirs”- Domaine Sylvain Bailly (Bué)

The 2014 Sancerre “Terroirs” from Sylvain Bailly is a lovely and rock solid example of Bué *terroir*, offering up a pure and gently grassy nose of gooseberry, grapefruit, damp grass, a touch of white pepper, beautiful chalky minerality and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very nicely delineated, with a good core, bright acids and excellent length and mineral drive on the long and zesty finish. Fine and classic Bué juice. 2015-2018. **89.**

2014 Sancerre “Chavignol”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (Chavignol)

With each passing vintage, the wines from Gérard Boulay seem to get just a touch more structured and serious out of the blocks, and this is most apparent in this lovely 2014 Chavignol bottling. The grapes for this cuvée all hail from *terres blanches* soils found in the village, with the wine raised primarily in stainless steel tanks, though five percent of the blend is now raised in old *foudres*. The bouquet on the 2014 wafts from the glass in a pretty and still quite primary blend of gooseberry, grapefruit, limestone minerality, orange peel, just a touch of cut grass and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is [pure, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with crisp acids and lovely length and grip on the bouncy and still quite youthful finish. This bottling used to offer very early accessibility in past vintages, but with the 2014, it seems to have moved up a step in “seriousness” when it comes to structure and really will be even better with a bit of bottle age. 2015-2025+. **91+.**

2014 Sancerre “Clos de Beaujeu”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (Chavignol)

The Clos de Beaujeu bottling from Domaine Boulay is produced from vines that average forty-five years of age and the 2014 is stellar. The bouquet is still quite primary, but shows plenty of complexity to come with a bit of bottle age, delivering scents of lemon, pink grapefruit, petrol, chalky minerality, spring flowers, a nice touch of grassiness and a youthful topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with outstanding mid-palate depth, zesty acids and exceptional focus and grip on the very long and still quite reserved finish. This is emphatically built for the cellar and needs bottle age to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge, but it is so well-balanced, that those curious can certainly drink it in its youth with great pleasure. But, try to tuck it away in the cellar for at least a few years and really let it blossom properly! 2017-2030+. **93+**.

2014 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (Chavignol)

The parcel of vines for the Monts Damnés bottling from Gérard Boulay hail from a plot of vines that lie on the lower half of the slope in the vineyard, directly adjacent to Edmond Vatan’s Clos la Néore parcel. The vines are forty-five years of age and the wine is fermented and raised entirely in older casks, with the 2014 offering up an utterly beautiful bouquet of lime, gooseberry, complex botanicals, lovely minerality, a hint of white pepper and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off stunning promise, with a rock solid core, bright acids and excellent grip on the very long and still quite primary finish. Great juice in the making. 2017-2030+. **93+**.

2014 Sancerre “La Côte”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (Chavignol)

The 2014 Sancerre “La Côte” from Domaine Gérard Boulay is a stunning young wine, soaring from the glass in a blaze of gooseberry, tart orange, chalky minerality, a touch of cut grass, incipient notes of petrol and a youthful topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a great core, impeccable balance, zesty acids and lovely purity and soil signature on the very, very long and still quite primary finish. Another stellar young bottle of Sancerre. 2018-2035. **94**.

2014 Sancerre “La Comtesse”- Domaine Gérard Boulay (Chavignol)

The 2014 La Comtesse, which hails from a plot of fifty year-old vines in the Monts Damnés, is stunning, delivering a very pure and complex bouquet of lime, gooseberry, complex, chalky minerality, citrus peel, loads of botanicals and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with superb refinement and precision, fine acidity and great length and grip on the impeccably balanced finish. This is entirely fermented and raised in three hundred liter, older casks, and this gives the wine a bit more early accessibility in comparison to wines such as the Clos de Beaujeu, but it has fine structural integrity underneath its veneer of accessibility and should age every bit as long as the La Côte. 2015-2035+. **95**.

2014 Sancerre “Le Mont”- Foucher-Lebrun (Alligny)

The 2014 le Mont bottling from Foucher-Lebrun is a superb bottle of young Sancerre, with the ripe fruit of the vintage and a fine chassis of acidity to carry the wine nicely for the next four or five years. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a youthful blend of grapefruit, lemon, a nice touch of botanicals, limestone minerality and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still a touch tightly-knit, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a long, zesty finish. This is superb bottle of Sancerre for current drinking or for keeping for a few years. 2015-2020. **91+**.

2014 Sancerre “La Garenne”- Domaine Fernand Girard et Fils

Domaine Girard always produces very classic, stainless steel-fermented Sancerre with plenty of personality at a very good price, and the 2014 is another fine example in this mold. The wine jumps from the glass in a blend of green apple, pink grapefruit, fresh-cut grass, chalky soil tones, an incipient touch of petrol and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and grassy, with a very good core, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the wide open and zesty finish. Lovely juice and a fine value. 2015-2019. **89.**

2014 Sancerre “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Pierre Morin (Bué)

The current releases mark the first vintage where Pierre Morin’s name alone appears on the label, as his father, Gérard is now in full retirement. The 2014 Vieilles Vignes cuvée is excellent, jumping from the glass in a vibrant blend of gooseberry, lime, chalky minerality, discreet notes of fresh cut grass and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly tightly-knit, with an excellent core, fine focus and cut and a long, vibrant finish. This is tasty already, but another six months in the bottle will really let it blossom structurally and drink with even more generosity. 2015-2020. **91.**

2014 Sancerre “Cuvée Les Côûtes”- Domaine Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy (Maimbray)

The 2014 Cuvée Les Côûtes” from Pascal and Nicolas Reverdy is a very young and tightly-wound bottle of Sancerre, with a great base of minerality, excellent purity of fruit and outstanding structure- all it needs is a bit more bottle age to more fully blossom! The youthful nose offers up a blend of gooseberry, grapefruit, chalky minerality, a dollop of the grassiness to come, citrus peel and a hint of white pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a rock solid core, great backend mineral drive, impeccable focus and grip and a long, snappy and still fairly primary finish. This is serious Sancerre and really needs a year or two in the cellar to really start to show all its layers. 2016-2025. **91+.**

2014 Sancerre “l’Authentique”- Claude et Florence Thomas-Labaille (Chavignol)

The 2014 l’Authentique bottling of Sancerre from Domaine Thomas-Labaille is a lovely and utterly classic expression of Chavignol minerality and bright fruit tones preserved with stainless steel fermentation. The exceptionally vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a blend of gooseberry, lime peel, fresh-cut grass, limestone minerality and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, racy and impeccably balanced finish. A really lovely bottle of Sancerre and one of the strongest vintages of l’Authentique in recent times. 2015-2023. **91.**

2014 Sancerre “les Monts Damnés”- Claude et Florence Thomas-Labaille (Chavignol)

The 2014 Monts Damnés bottling from Domaine Thomas-Labaille is an utter classic in the making, but despite this wine being accessible now, it is still emphatically a puppy and needs some bottle age to really blossom and show all of its inherent complexity. The dynamite bouquet offers up a very pure and very deep constellation of sweet grapefruit, gooseberry, kaleidoscopic minerality, refined botanicals, orange peel and a gentle topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with great focus and cut, impeccable focus and stunning length and grip on the very soil-driven and utterly seamless finish. The 2014 is the finest bottling of Thomas-Labaille Monts Damnés in many years! 2017-2035+. **94.**

2014 Sancerre- Domaine des Vieux Pruniers (Bué)

The 2014 Sancerre from Christian Thiot-Fournier’s Domaine des Vieux Pruniers is quite young and tightly-knit out of the blocks, but with outstanding purity and soil signature just waiting to be fully unlocked with a few more months bottle age. The reticent nose is deep and very precise, delivering a fine blend of tart orange, pink grapefruit, chalky minerality, a hint of

white pepper, cut grass and citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and racy, with a superb core, brisk acids and lovely transparency on the very long and youthful finish. This is certainly drinkable today, but it is still a puppy and will be absolutely stellar with six more months in the bottle, so that the inherent depth here can come out from behind the girdle of acidity. 2016-2020. **91+**.

2013 Sancerre “les Culs de Beaujeu”- Domaine François Cotat (Chavignol)

The 2013 Sancerre “les Culs de Beaujeu” from François Cotat is a lovely wine from a difficult vintage and it strikes me very much as similar in its youth to how the lovely 1993 Cotat wines might have shown at a similar stage in evolution. I only mention the 1993s as a good friend served me a bottle a few years ago and it had aged brilliantly, despite clearly having started out life with only moderate ripeness and concentration. The 2013 Culs de Beaujeu wafts from the glass in a blend of green apple, lime, fresh-cut grass, a fine base of chalky soil tones, lime peel and plenty of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and moderately ripe, with a fine core and lovely length and grip on the zesty and still quite youthful finish. This wine needs at least a few more years in the cellar to start to blossom, but I suspect it will be a real long-distance runner and deliver its most pleasure at least a decade from now. 2017-2035+. **92.**

2013 Sancerre “Chêne Marchand”- Domaine Pierre Morin (Bué)

The 2013 Chêne Marchand from Pierre Morin is a pure and beautifully classic expression of Bué’s greatest *terroir*. The pure, nascently complex and mineral-infused bouquet offers up scents of green apple, lime, kaleidoscopic limestone minerality, gentle notes of cut grass, spring flowers and a discreet topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, bright acids and superb focus on the long, racy and youthful finish. This is an exemplary 2013 Sancerre, without quite the mid-palate intensity that one finds in top 2014s, but impeccable precision and seamless balance. 2015-2025. **91+.**

2013 Sancerre “Cuvée les Angeslots” V.V.- Dom. Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy (Maimbray)

The 2013 old vine bottling of Cuvée les Angeslots from the Reverdy family, which hails from seventy-five year-old vines, is really an outstanding bottle of Sancerre, with impeccable expression of *terroir* and lovely focus and balance. The first class bouquet delivers a blend of gooseberry, lime, fresh cut grass, beautiful chalky soil tones, spring flowers and just a whisper of esthery bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and pure, with crisp acids a wide open personality and outstanding complexity on the long and classy finish. This is not quite as profound as the 2012 version, but in the more difficult 2013 vintage, this is another outstanding success and a beautiful bottle of Sancerre. 2015-2017. **91.**

2013 Sancerre “Clos la Néore”- Domaine Edmond et Anne Vatan (Chavignol)

I love every vintage of Clos la Néore produced by the Vatan family, but it is the cooler, leaner years like 2013 where I have had my greatest success aging this wine for the very long haul. The 2013 vintage has produced a wine here at 12.5 percent and this seems likely to age along the lines of vintages like 1988, 1993, 1997 and 1998 here, which are timeless examples of the magic of this *terroir* and the Vatan family’s guardianship. The 2013 Clos la Néore delivers a simply stunning young nose of lime, green apple, fresh mint, crystalline minerality, Vatan botanicals, a hint of beeswax and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and utterly defined by its minerality, with a fine core of fruit, brisk acids, laser-like focus and great cut and grip on the very long, youthful and perfectly balanced finish. The wine is already a

great pleasure to drink, but this is very early days for the 2013 Clos la Néore and I would urge folks to cellar this wine for at least another five years, as it will be a legend in due course. 2020-2045+. **95.**



A beautiful midsummer afternoon in the Sancerre vineyards outside of the village of Bué.

Sancerre Rouge

2013 Sancerre Rouge “Terre de Maimbray”- Dom. Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy (Maimbray)

The 2013 Sancerre Rouge “Terre de Maimbray” from Pascal and Nicolas Reverdy is really a lovely bottle of red fruity pinot noir, with a sense of elegant refinement out of the blocks that is not always apparent with red wines from Sancerre. The bouquet offers up a pure and vibrant blend of cherries, a touch of *fraises du bois*, charred wood, chalky soil tones, *fine herbs* and a nice, discreet framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely sappy at the core, with excellent transparency, impeccable balance, tangy acids and a long, ripely tannic and complex finish. One of the best young Sancerre *rouge* bottlings I have had the pleasure to taste. 2017-2035+. **93.**

2012 Sancerre Rouge “la Croix Renaud”- Clément et Florian Berthier

The 2012 Sancerre Rouge “la Croix Renaud” from Clément and Florian Berthier sees a bit of new oak, which is handled very skillfully. The deep and complex bouquet offers up a fine blend of black cherries, gamebirds, woodsmoke, discreetly autumnal soil tones, espresso, a dollop of herbs and a nice framing of smoky oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and

soil-driven, with a good core, tangy acids, moderate tannins and a long, focused and complex finish. This is just starting to blossom at three years of age and will be even better with a bit more bottle age, but it is not a bad drink today by any stretch of the imagination. A really high class bottle of Sancerre rouge. 2015-2030. **91.**

2012 Sancerre Rouge- Domaine Pierre Morin (Bué)

The 2012 Sancerre Rouge from Pierre Morin is a very young wine and plenty reductive when first opened (or at least my bottle was), so decanting is absolutely mandatory to allow it to open up and show its potential. With extended aeration the wine cleans up and offers a young and deep bouquet of black berries, bitter cherry, charred wood, chalky soil tones, venison and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still incredibly backward, with plenty of firm, but well-integrated tannins, a fine core of fruit, bracing acids and a very long, primary and soil-driven finish. This wine is seven to ten years away from blossoming, but it is well-balanced and my gut instinct is that, if given enough time in the cellar, it will come around to be a very good bottle of Sancerre rouge. But, time is most definitely required. 2022-2045+. **88+.**

BEAUX FRÈRES
VOLUPTUOUS OREGON PINOT NOIR SINCE 1990



The origins of the Beaux Frères winery date back to the summer of 1986, when Michael Etzel spotted an old pig farm for sale in the northern Willamette Valley and dreamed of putting in a vineyard on the location. He purchased the property that year, with assistance from his brother-in-law, Robert Parker, and Michael moved his family west from Colorado and began clearing acreage and putting in vines. He decided to focus exclusively on pinot noir for his vineyards in those early years, and learned the art of winemaking by working alongside Dick Ponzi of nearby Ponzi Vineyards. The first pinot noir vines in what would become the Beaux Frères Vineyard, which now encompasses just under ten hectares, went into the ground in 1987. Over the course of his first four years on the farm, Michael worked the harvests over at Ponzi Vineyards, while continuing to clear his own land and plant vines. That Michael had selected an excellent site for his pinot noir vineyards was readily apparent when the vines were old enough to sell the first crop in the 1990 vintage, as Dick Ponzi and Ken Wright took all of his production, with the exception of the grapes Michael kept behind for himself to produce a single barrel of his first Beaux Frères pinot noir. In 1991, the two brothers-in-law, which is how the winery would take its name of Beaux Frères, decided to bring in a third partner, Robert Roy to allow for the construction of a proper winery on the farm and the foundation was in place for the estate's first small commercial release of Beaux Frères pinot noir in the 1991 vintage.

The original Beaux Frères Vineyard of 9.73 hectares was planted in a high density pattern, with the vineyard having a southerly exposition (bending around from southeast to due south to southwest, following the contour of the hillsides), and since 2000, it has been augmented by a second pinot noir vineyard on the property, the Upper Terrace Vineyard, which sits on four hectares on the next ridge over from the original parcel and is planted at a similar density. In addition to pinot noir, there are forty *ares* of grenache also planted in Upper Terrace. Since the 2002 vintage, the winery has produced a single vineyard bottling from the Upper Terrace Vineyard. The vines in the Beaux Frères Vineyard now range from eleven to twenty-four years of age, or as the Burgundians would term it, the vineyard is just starting to “get to a good age,” with the Upper Terrace vines still a bit younger. The vineyards are trained by the Guyot method, and yields are kept low to ensure concentration and character. In the event of a generous fruit set, a green harvest will be carried out to keep the crop load within the targeted range. Since the first vintage, Michael Etzel has sought “physiological ripeness” for his fruit, so harvesting is done on the late side at Beaux Frères to ensure higher sugar levels and ripe tannins. There has always been a few small parcels of chardonnay also on the ranch, but the winery has only produced chardonnay commercially in a few vintages, and other than the 1992, the team at Beaux Frères has not been content with the results. Like the pinot noir, the chardonnay was always harvested quite late, which may have contributed to the winery’s unhappiness with how it has evolved over an extended period in bottle. The vineyards on the Beaux Frères estate have been dry-farmed organically since early in the new millennium, and in 2007, the vineyard team here began the transition over to full biodynamic farming.

In the early years, Michael Etzel handled all of the winemaking duties himself at Beaux Frères, but since 2006, he has shared the winemaking duties with Grant Coulter at the estate. Since its very earliest vintages, the Beaux Frères pinot noirs have been produced by allowing the grapes to undergo a pre-fermentation maceration, or “cold soak” of five to seven days, prior to the start of fermentation. The grapes have always been completely destemmed. Indigenous yeasts are used in most vintages, with only cultured yeasts resorted to if a particular vintage or vat is slow to get out of the blocks after temperatures are raised post-cold soak. Punch-downs of the cap are done twice a day by hand, with the wines racked into French oak barrels for their malolactic fermentations and *elevage*. A fairly high percentage of new oak has always been used for the wines here, with lighter vintages typically raised in fifty percent new wood and richer years in seventy-five percent or more. Toast of the barrels also varies with vintage, but tends to be pretty generously done in many years and was probably typically higher toast in the earliest vintages. One of the interesting practices in the cellars at Beaux Frères is that the domaine does not believe in racking their wines at all between malolactic fermentation and the *assemblage* in tanks prior to bottling, so the wines tend to build up a pretty high level of dissolved CO₂ during their *elevage*, which can sometimes still be found in the bottled wines many years down the road. Time spent in barrel is fairly short, ranging from ten to twelve months, as befits a pinot noir being raised in a high percentage of new wood and experiencing plenty of micro-oxygenation through the more open pores of the new casks. The wines have always been bottled unfinned and unfiltered.

The first couple of vintages at Beaux Frères vineyard pinot noir were produced in tiny quantities, as for example, the first commercial release of 1991 only saw seventy-five cases of pinot noir produced. With each passing vintage, the production levels rose gently, as less fruit

was sold off to neighbors and more vines coming of age in the vineyards. Today, production figures vary from vintage to vintage but tend to be in the neighborhood of twenty-one hundred cases of the Beaux Frères Vineyard bottling, five to nine hundred cases for the Upper Terrace bottling and two thousand to twenty-five hundred of their blended Willamette Valley cuvée. The winery took the extraordinary decision to declassify all of their Upper Terrace bottling in the 2011 vintage, as they felt the quality simply did not meet their expectations for this cuvée. Starting with the 1996 vintage, Michael Etzel began to produce a “second label” bottling of pinot noir from his Beaux Frères Vineyard, which was made from younger vines and de-classified fruit harvested in the parcel, and which was originally labeled as Belles Soeurs Pinot Noir. As the popularity of the Belles Soeurs bottling rose, younger vine fruit from the estate’s vineyards was augmented by purchased grapes to expand the production for this cuvée. In 1998, the lineup under the Belles Soeurs label was expanded further with some purchased fruit or a lineup of single vineyard bottlings, with the first single vineyard designate under this label hailing from the Shea Vineyard, and the roster of single vineyard Belles Soeurs cuvées was expanded over the years, as opportunity allowed. Eventually, Belles Soeurs single vineyard bottlings also appearing from fruit sourced from the Temperance Hill Vineyard in the Eola Hills and the Ana Vineyard in the Dundee Hills. From 1998 forwards, the Belles Soeurs label was used either to produce single vineyard wines from purchased fruit or a Willamette Valley pinot noir from a blend of different vineyard sources that still included the younger vine fruit from the Beaux Frères vineyard.

In 2005, the winery changed gears a bit with their two labels, as Michael began to produce the “Willamette Valley” pinot noir under his Beaux Frères label, which was made from a combination of younger vine fruit in the Upper Terrace and Beaux Frères vineyards, in addition to purchased fruit, and the Belles Soeurs label was discontinued. From that time forward, the winery’s “Willamette Valley” bottling has been produced each vintage, with the fruit sources varying, but the wine made with the same cellar practices as the two estate vineyard designate bottlings, with the exception that the percentage of new oak used for the Willamette Valley cuvée is lower than for the single vineyard estate wines. Starting with the 2012 vintage, Beaux Frères again began producing some single vineyard bottlings from high quality fruit that they had purchased, which is now labeled under their “Vineyard Designate” series. These are decidedly made in very small lots, with the 2012 vintage producing three different vineyard bottlings: Gran Moraine Vineyard (two hundred sixteen cases produced), Savoya Vineyard (two barrels or fifty cases produced) and Zena Crown Vineyard (two hundred sixty-one cases produced). The 2013 vintage saw two more single vineyard bottlings of pinot noir produced in this series, the Guadalupe Vineyard and the Hyland Vineyard (but no Savoya Vineyard 2013). In 2001, the team at Beaux Frères also began another second label project, called “Les Cousins”, with an eye towards producing a more forward style of pinot noir that could be enjoyed right out of the blocks, and have produced the wine when the vintage characteristics have allowed, but not in every year, though there has been a Les Cousins bottling in every recent vintage since 2009.

In October of this year I was invited to participate in an extraordinary vertical tasting of the Beaux Frères Vineyard bottling of pinot noir, with every vintage ever produced here up through the current release of the 2012 represented in our lineup. The lion’s share of the collection had been painstakingly put together by Lynda and Marty Hale, who have been longtime mailing list clients of the winery. Lynda had been up in New York in the spring for a Burgundy tasting and had mentioned that she and Marty were getting down to their last bottles of

their very first vintages of Beaux Frères and thought it might make sense to do a tasting before those rare older vintages were finished off, and she reached out to the team at Beaux Frères to fill in a few holes in the lineup, so we were able to work through an extraordinary range of twenty-three vintages of the wine, dating back to the very first year of 1990, which had only seen a single barrel (twenty-five cases) produced and none made available commercially. It was an extraordinary and once in a lifetime opportunity to taste the entire history of this bottling from its earliest incarnation and follow its evolution in style over the course of nearly a quarter century of bottlings, and Marty was able to augment our complete vertical of the Beaux Frères vineyard bottling with the first three vintages of the Shea Vineyard bottling made from purchased fruit and bottled at that time under the Belles Soeurs second label at the estate. It was a great evening, and all the more fascinating for me, as I tasted the first several vintages of Beaux Frères pinot noir back in the 1990s, but had not seen a bottle cross my path over the course of the subsequent fifteen years, so I was extremely curious to see how Mike Etzel and his team had progressed over the years here on Ribbon Ridge. There has clearly been a refinement in the style of these wines as the years have gone by and I found myself liking the newest releases every bit as much or more than any of the top vintages from the first fifteen years.

The wines were very interesting to taste, as a few of the winemaking practices used at the estate since day one give the wine a quite unique personality. The pre-fermentation “cold soak” creates quite a black fruity and plummy fruit expression out of the blocks, and all of the wines seem to pick up also a bit of cola in their aromatic and flavor from their pre-fermentation maceration and which many carry through much of their lives. The plums and cola notes found in young vintages of the Beaux Frères Vineyard bottling often remind me quite a bit of Richebourg. In addition, the lack of racking between alcoholic fermentation and the *assemblage* immediately prior to bottling does indeed allow a fair bit of carbon dioxide to be dissolved in the wines by the time they go into bottle. Much to my surprise, even in one of the very earliest vintages, the 1992, there remained a touch of CO₂ in the wine more than twenty years out from the bottling. After working through such a large range of vintages of the Beaux Frères Vineyard bottling, I think that this tendency to allow the carbon dioxide to remain in the wine during the *elevage* and subsequent bottling may be taking some elegance away from the wines when they are fully mature, as it is a bit of a distraction on the palate and perhaps, at least one racking during the *elevage* prior to *assemblage* might help get some of this CO₂ out of the wines and help them age even more flatteringly over the long haul? One of our hosts for the tasting, Chet Kern, was in contact with Mike Etzel prior to the event to discuss preparation for the wines prior to serving and Mike felt that the older vintages should not be decanted or given any extended aeration, so we simply double-decanted each wine promptly before serving, just to remove the sediment from the bottles and ensure that all twelve tasters got good, clean pours of each wine. Perhaps if we had gone ahead and decanted the wines and left them in decanter for a bit of time prior to tasting, the CO₂ element would have been less noticeable. But across the board, the dissolved carbon dioxide in the wines was a defining element for many of the wines, with the expectation that this would eventually fade away with extended bottle age not always born out with the oldest vintages in the lineup.

The winery seems to have gone through phase in the 1990s of using either a higher percentage of new wood for the wines, or using a different style of toasting of the barrels in this era, and the vintages from 1999 back to 1990 were all, to a greater or lesser degree, more marked

by their new oak components than was the case with the wines from the twenty-first century. The oak was never too aggressive on the nose or flavor spectrum in the wines from the 1990s, but all of the vintages showed at least a touch of uncovered, dry wood tannins on their backends and the wood was perhaps a bit too generous in those vintages for long-term aging. However, the fruit components in every vintage, all the way back to the 1990, remained vibrant and nicely present in the wines and almost all of the older vintages had developed some nice autumnal complexity with extended bottle age. As the winery has really had to work primarily with young vine fruit since day one, there is a sometimes lack of mid-palate density in the wines over longer-term aging, which in my experience is just quite typical with younger vine bottlings. I should note that in the most recent vintages this seemed to be less evident and the wines seemed quite likely to have a bit more core when a couple of decades of bottle age has rolled by than was the case with the very earliest vintages. In contrast, the three vintages produced from the Shea Vineyard fruit from the late 1990s, which were bottled under the Belles Soeurs label, showed a bit more mid-palate sappiness and concentration than the Beaux Frères Vineyard bottlings from the same years, though the block of Shea Vineyard that the winery was purchasing fruit from at this time was only planted in 1990. When I checked with the winery, Mike noted that the Shea Vineyard bottlings in this era were raised in fifty percent new wood and bottled after ten or eleven months *elevage*, which would have been a bit less new wood than used for the Beaux Frères Vineyard cuvée in the late 1990s.



Mike Etzel on the tractor on an early morning during harvest at Beaux Frères a couple of years ago.

The Beaux Frères Vineyard cuvées varied quite a bit in alcohol depending on the characteristics of the vintage, with my favorite wines tending to be in the thirteen to fourteen percent range. Many of the vintages north of fourteen percent showed varying degrees of backend heat on the palate, though often their aromatics would be a bit more developed and generous and I have to assume that many of the winery's clientele would have enjoyed these vintages very much in their youth, if they were looking for wines that were more immediately accessible. But, with a bit of extended aging, the higher octane vintages tended to be the less interesting to my palate, and few of these riper years also showed more overt uncovered oak tannins from having soaked more oak influence into solution at their higher alcohol levels during the *elevage*. Based on this vertical tasting, I felt the real sweet spot for the fruit from the Beaux Frères Vineyard bottling tended to be between thirteen and 13.6 percent alcohol or so, which allowed for a good combination of ripe, expressive fruit tones in the wines and very good balance on the palate, with no signs of backend heat. Interestingly, the one vintage just under thirteen percent alcohol, the 2011 (12.9 percent) was just a touch malnourished on the palate and not in the league with the other recent vintages of Beaux Frères, but this was a difficult vintage in the Willamette Valley and the wine was still a very good bottle from a challenging year. However, over the course of nearly a quarter century of vintages, the consistency of the bottling was quite evident and the top vintages were all very good wines. As I noted above, the combination of the vineyards getting older in recent times and what seems like some fine-tuning in the winemaking philosophies here have produced some very strong wines in recent vintages and I would argue that Mike Etzel and his team at Beaux Frères are currently making the best wines of their careers.

The following wines were all tasted here in New York in October at Lynda and Marty Hale's extraordinary vertical tasting. All the bottles were double-decanted prior to service and we all worked through them from youngest to oldest at our own pace. Given my penchant for tasting through the wines fairly slowly, I often saw these wines after a bit of time had passed from their original double-decanting, which was all to the good for them, as they had a chance to really open up a bit and show more of their inherent complexity, though often without ever fully shaking the dissolved carbon dioxide that was quite evident in many of the Beaux Frères Vineyard bottlings (but not really prevalent in any of the Shea Vineyard cuvées from the late 1990s). As I noted above, I wondered if some extended aeration in decanters would have helped the gas to be released, but we were following the suggestion of Mike Etzel, who obviously knows these wines far better than any of us at the tasting.

2012 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2012 vintage from the Beaux Frères Vineyard is a fine young bottle of pinot noir, tipping the scales at 14.1 percent and offering up a ripe, nascently complex nose of plums, cola, spicy wood and a touch of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and shows moderate tannins, with a good core and the faintest whisper of backend heat. This is approachable today, but really deserves a few years in the cellar to start to develop some of its secondary layers of complexity. Good juice. 2020-2045+. **91+**.

2011 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2011 vintage was challenging in this area of the Willamette Valley, and the Beaux Frères Vineyard bottling is a very good effort for this difficult year. The wine is 12.9 percent octane and delivers a bouquet of cherries, red plums, cola, spice tones, a hint of gamebird and

toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full and nicely transparent, but a touch thin at the core and rather discreet in its intensity on the fairly long finish. There is a fair bit of tannin here, with some of it wood tannin that may not find sufficient stuffing in this more trying vintage to absorb it over the long haul. Not a bad wine by any stretch of the imagination, the 2011 Beaux Frères Vineyard pinot noir is also one of the weakest recent vintages for this bottling. 2021-2045. 88+?

2010 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2010 Beaux Frères Vineyard pinot noir is only very slightly riper than the 2011, coming in at an even thirteen percent, but here the wine has excellent mid-palate depth and plenty of backend stuffing to keep all of its components beautifully in balance. The first class nose is just starting to show some development in its aromatic blend of plums, cocoa, the first touches of forest floor, cola and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows a very good core, with moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the promising finish. The wine has still not completely absorbed its wood tannins on the backend, but here, in contrast to the 2011, there seems to be plenty of buffering fruit to absorb the wood with a bit more bottle age and the wine should prove to be a classic vintage for this bottling. 2022-2050. 92.

2009 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2009 Beaux Frères Vineyard bottling is one of the riper recent years here, coming in at 14.2 percent alcohol and showing some of the unstructured buxom qualities or a riper example of pinot noir. The nose is a generous mélange of black cherries, plums, chocolate, nutmeg and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and voluptuous on the attack, but with a dip in the mid-palate, modest tannins and a bit of overt backend heat poking out on the really quite loosely-knit finish. This is okay for non-contemplative quaffing over the relative near-term, but not nearly as interesting as the two excellent vintages, the 2010 and 2008, that flanked it in our vertical. 2015-2025+. 87.

2008 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

2008 is another very strong vintage for the Beaux Frères Vineyard bottling of pinot noir, as the wine offers up a deep and complex nose of plums, black cherries, cola, forest floor, a touch of sweet nuttiness and a nice framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, tangy finish that still shows some CO2 in need of dissolution with further bottle age. The wine came in at the sweet spot of 13.6 percent octane and really seems extremely well-balanced at this ripeness level, with the depth and classy structure to age long and very gracefully. 2018-2040. 92.

2007 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2007 is quite similar in profile to the 2008 vintage of Beaux Frères Vineyard, coming in at a similar alcohol level of 13.5 percent and offering up comparable depth, purity and nascent complexity on both the nose and palate. The lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of red plums, cherries, a touch of gamebird, chocolate, forest floor and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely primary, with a very good core, modest tannins and a long, tangy finish that is light on its feet and only very discreetly spritzzy. I really like this vintage of the Beaux Frères Vineyard bottling and would expect it to age very well indeed. 2017-2045. 92+.

2006 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2006 vintage of Beaux Frères Vineyard pinot noir is one of the ripest and least interesting in recent years, as it tips the scales at a hefty 14.8 percent alcohol. Surprisingly, it is

still quite interesting on the nose, as it shows no overt signs of *sur maturité* and is quite attractive in its juicy and fairly simple blend of plums, black cherries, chocolate and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is not as good as it is on the nose, as it is full-bodied, plush and lacking in complexity, with plenty of overt heat on the backend, a higher degree of uncovered oak tannins, and no real grip. This will need drinking early, and is not in the league with most of the other vintages produced here from 2005 through 2012. 2015-2023+? **86.**

2005 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2005 is another very good vintage for the pinot noir bottling from the Beaux Frères Vineyard, as it offers up lovely purity and depth on both the nose and palate. The ripe and finely-honed nose wafts from the glass in a blend of plums, black cherries, cola, incipient notes of autumnal soil tones, a touch of fresh thyme, smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a good, solid core, moderate tannins and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. Good juice that is almost into its apogee of peak drinkability, and will offer up a good couple of decades of fine drinking. 2017-2035+. **92.**

2004 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2004 vintage is one of a string of wines that are north of fourteen percent alcohol, and it seems that in this era, Mike Etzel and his team were seeking out a bit higher octane for the bottling, with less satisfactory results than what is found in more recent vintages. The 2004 is 14.3 percent octane and offers up a ripe, developed and attractive nose of plums, black cherries, chocolate, a bit of menthol, spice tones, forest floor and toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and seems just a touch higher in octane than its stated 14.3 percent, with a good core, some uncovered wood tannins on the backend and a ripe, slightly hot finish. Aromatically this is more interesting than on the palate, but as far as ripe pinot noir goes, it is not badly done. 2015-2030. **88.**

2003 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2003 vintage of Beaux Frères Vineyard pinot noir is also listed at 14.3 percent, but again, this seems slightly low for the profile of the wine, as it wafts from the glass in a ripe mélange of jammy black cherries, a touch of meatiness, forest floor, chocolate and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is big, full-bodied and reasonably complex, with a bit of tanginess provided by its remaining CO₂, but a fair bit of backend heat and coarse wood tannins on the fairly long, but unsatisfying finish. This is okay for near-term drinking, but Beaux Frères is making far more serious pinots in recent times. 2015-2025. **87.**

2002 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

Like the 2003, the 2002 Beaux Frères Vineyard is labeled with an alcohol level of 14.3 percent, but seems riper than this on both the nose and palate. The jammy nose is a mix of black cherries, cola, oak spices, a touch of fresh thyme and a bit of nuttiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and plush on the attack, but a bit hollow at the core, with melting tannins, still a bit of dissolved CO₂ and some overt heat on the backend. Like the 2003 vintage, this is not bad, but not up to the standards of today's bottlings. 2015-2025. **88.**

2001 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2001 vintage of Beaux Frères Vineyard pinot noir was my favorite of the range that exceeded the fourteen percent threshold, as this is listed at 14.4 percent, but is pretty nicely balanced for its octane level and offers up some fine complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a constellation of plums, black cherries, *sous bois*, a touch of nuttiness, cocoa and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and nicely balanced,

with a good core, melting tannins and only a touch of backend heat on the long, ripe and generous finish. Really well done in its riper style. 2015-2030. **90.**

2000 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 2000 vintage of Beaux Frères Vineyard pinot is also 14.4 percent, but does a very nice job of retaining its shape and bounce on the nose and is really a very interesting aromatic mix of red and black cherries, forest floor, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke, gamebirds and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, fairly complex and generous on the attack, with a moderate core, melting tannins, still a whisper of CO2 and just a bit of backend heat from its octane level. This is just a touch too ripe to be outstanding, but it has aged pretty well and is still fairly satisfying. 2015-2027. **89.**



2000 Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir- Belles Soeurs

For whatever reason, all of the Shea Vineyard bottlings of pinot noir that were offered under the Belles Soeurs label are lower in octane than their corresponding vintage counterpart from the Beaux Frères Vineyard. Mike Etzel was sourcing a different block in this vineyard back then than he currently uses for the Beaux Frères “Vineyard Designate” series, but this parcel seems to have turned out a nice trio of wines in the late 1990s. The 2000 Shea comes in at 13.9 percent and offers up a still fairly youthful nose of dark berries, black cherries, a bit of tariness, dark soil tones, a touch of charred wood, mustard seed and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a notably deeper core than the Beaux Frères Vineyard bottling, moderate tannins and a long, still fairly primary finish. The Shea Vineyard bottlings in

this era were raised in fifty percent new wood, and I would guess that this was a touch less new wood than in the Beaux Frères Vineyard cuvées from the same vintages. At age fifteen, this remains a young wine in need of more bottle age, but it is going to be very, very good at its apogee. 2020-2045+. **91+**.

1999 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 1999 vintage seems to be one of the last of the more aggressive style of new wood used here for the Beaux Frères Vineyard bottling, as the wine is a touch lower in octane than the 2000 version (14.2 versus 14.4), but today the wine is decidedly more marked by its new oak component than any of the subsequent vintages here. The nose is a blend of black cherries, spicy new wood, a bit of tariness, gamebirds and a topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely developed, with a decent core, but a rather rigid backend from its new wood component, which has robbed the wine of a bit of succulence and bounce on the finish. The wine has also sacrificed a bit of complexity to its wood element. Solid, but not better. 2015-2025+. **87**.

1999 Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir- Belles Soeurs

The 1999 vintage of Belles Soeurs Shea Vineyard pinot noir is really excellent, with depth, balance and incipient complexity that augurs extremely well for its continued positive evolution in bottle. The deep and sappy nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, fresh herb tones, bitter chocolate, a fine base of dark soil and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely sappy at the core, with moderate tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and still climbing finish. Fine juice that will continue to blossom in the coming years. 2015-2040. **93**.

1998 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

This was an off bottle, as the wine was badly reduced when we first opened it and never really was able to shake this characteristic, so I did not rate the wine. Underneath the reduction the wine seemed to have plenty of merit and it would be fun to taste a pristine example.

1998 Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir- Belles Soeurs

The first vintage of Belles Soeurs pinot noir sourced entirely from the Shea Vineyard is very good, but not quite as refined or complex as the 1999 or 2000 versions. The wine tips the scales at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a deep, but ever so slightly four-square nose of red and black cherries, chocolate, woodsmoke, a touch of damp herbs, dark soil and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit chunky in personality, with good mid-palate concentration, sound focus and a long, chewy and tangy finish. This still needs a few more years of cellaring to really blossom and start to drink with generosity. 2018-2035. **89**.

1997 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

Like the 1999 version from the Beaux Frères Vineyard, the 1997 pinot noir from this parcel seems quite a bit more marked by its new oak component than the wines of recent times. The wine offers up a truly lovely nose, which delivers scents of red and black cherries, fresh herb tones, dried eucalyptus, forest floor and a fair bit of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, but a touch thin in the mid-palate and with the wood tannins now starting to stick out again on the backend and slightly dry the good long finish of the wine. This was probably better several years ago, when there may well have been a bit more buffering fruit stuffing to carry the wood, but today, the oak is starting to get in the way on the backend. 2015-2025+. **87** (with a 91 point nose).

1996 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 1997, 1996 and 1995 vintages of Beaux Frères pinot noir all come in within the sweet spot of ripeness for this vineyard, as all are 13.5 percent octane, but this too has a bit too much new oak for its own good and is starting to feel some ill effects from uncovered oak tannins on the palate. The nose is really lovely today, offering up a particularly red fruity blend for the Beaux Frères Vineyard bottling in its mix of cherries, pomegranate, fresh herb tones, autumnal soil elements and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and starting to dry out from under its new wood, with good length and grip, but some uncovered wood tannins now in the ascendency on the complex finish. It is a pity, as there are really good elements under the wood. Drink up. 2015-2020. **85.**

1995 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 1995 is carrying its lumber just a bit better than the 1996, but this too is starting to suffer from not quite enough remaining stuffing for its new wood treatment. The bouquet is a quite classic, black fruity mélange of plums, black cherries, forest floor, mustard seed and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full and a bit thin at the core, with good length and bounce, still a touch of CO₂ and some dry-edged wood tannins now uncovered on the fairly long finish. Not bad, but again, the wine has time in hand solely because of the oak treatment and probably should be finished up in the next handful of years. 2015-2020. **87.**

1994 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 1994 vintage of Beaux Frères Vineyard pinot noir was one of the very first super-ripe years for this wine, tipping the scales at fully 14.5 percent and I remember really not liking its over the top style when the wine was first released anywhere near as much as the 1993 vintage. Twenty-one years on, the wine is starting to collapse into senility and is one of the least interesting vintages in this wide range, as it offers up a dulled, overripe nose of stewed black cherries, tar, damp earth and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fat and drying out, with some uncovered wood tannins and the remaining fruit already getting a touch oxidative in nature. Not a surprising result for a wine that seemed to trade on its upfront and voluptuous appeal right out of the blocks and was probably meant to be drunk in its youth- when it had a strong legion of fans. 2015-2020. **80.**

1993 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

Right out of the blocks, I liked the 1993 vintage of Beaux Frères very well indeed, and the wine has aged quite nicely, with the caveat that at age twenty-two it has still retained a fair bit of CO₂ and this is not such an alluring element at this point in the wine's evolution. But, the bouquet is quite lovely in its blend of desiccated cherries and plums, *sous bois*, cola, woodsmoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely focused, with just a touch of dry-edged wood tannins poking out today, but with the carbon dioxide in solution more troubling texturally at the present time on the quite long and complex finish. This has aged pretty well at its quite civilized octane of thirteen percent and is not a bad drink, but it would have been even better if that CO₂ could have somehow been released during its sojourn in the cellar. 2015-2025+. **89.**

1992 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The 1992 Beaux Frères Vineyard pinot noir, which was only the second commercially released vintage, is a touch riper than its successor vintage of 1993, as the wine came in at 13.7 percent alcohol, but has aged quite well and is again, only really troubled by a bit of dissolved carbon dioxide in solution in the wine. The bouquet offers up a fine mix of baked plums, black cherries, damp earth, mocha, forest floor and toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is

medium-full, long and fully mature, with tertiary complexity, just the first signs of oxidative elements creeping into the fruit component, a fair bit of CO₂, but still good length on the fully mature finish. This is just starting to slide over the far side of its plateau, but has probably drunk quite well for all of its life. Drink up. 2015-2020. **87.**

1991 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

Sadly, as there were only seventy-five cases of the 1991 produced, our bottle was corked! Underneath the TCA was a very, very good bottle and this may well have been one of the most interesting releases from Beaux Frères in the decade of the 1990s.

1990 Beaux Frères Vineyard Pinot Noir- Beaux Frères (Ribbon Ridge)

The very first vintage of Beaux Frères Vineyard pinot noir, made in a single cask (that I assume was new), has aged pretty well and clearly shows the promise that Mike Etzel has realized here at Beaux Frères as the years have gone by. It is pretty black fruity in profile on both the nose and palate, offering up scents of black cherries, road tar, woodsmoke, damp soil and a fairly heavily-charred serving of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and still quite well-balanced, with moderate depth at the core, little remaining tannin and a fairly short, but still quite tasty finish. Not bad for an experimental first lot of pinot noir! 2015-2025. **88.**

A FINE ADDENDUM OF NEO-CLASSICAL AMERICAN WINES



As I noted in last issue's report on American wine traditionalists, several of my favorite producers were in the process of arranging samples of their new releases at the time of my writing the last article, so I was very happy to have a flock of top American wines arrive at my door over the last couple of months and stock the pages of this addendum. California had an early harvest in 2015, so many winery principals had far better things to do the sending out samples, as getting grapes in and fermentations started as the month of September dawned was at the top of everyone's agenda. Happily, many folks had time as picking wound to a close to get wines out the door, and several distributors here in New York who had not gotten me out their traditional American producers' new releases also sent along current bottlings to fill the pages of this follow-up article. As I noted in the last issue, American wines are as good today as they have ever been in the past- at least at the addresses that are interested in crafting wines of balance and sane alcohol levels. There are plenty that still continue to produce grape-flavored cocktails of indifferent or egregious quality here in the states, and their over the top wines still seem to have a following amongst a segment of the American wine market, but based on the growing number of more traditionally-styled American wines that cross my path each year, I have to assume that the legions of fans for the high octane styles of US wines are not as numerous as in the days of yore. The following report is sorted by varietal, then vintage and finally producer.

Chenin Blanc

2014 Leo Steen Chenin Blanc (Dry Creek Valley)

As I noted last year, Leo Steen is a former sommelier and he has started to produce this lovely, dry chenin blanc from a parcel of thirty-four year-old vines in Dry Creek Valley that are planted on an old, stony, dried up riverbed. The 2014 version is a touch riper than the 2013, but still very modest in its 13.1 percent alcohol and offers up a fine and classic nose of apple, quince, a touch of wet wool, citrus peel and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with a good core, fine focus and a long, primary finish. This wine needs a bit of time, but will be outstanding if given a bit of bottle age, and is really a style of wine that we should see more of from California! Fine juice. 2016-2026+. **89+**.

2011 Leo Steen “The Steen” Chenin Blanc (Santa Ynez Valley)

This bottling of chenin blanc hails from the Jurassic Vineyard in Santa Ynez Valley, which is planted on a base of sand and limestone. The wine is fermented in concrete egg and aged for five months in older barrels prior to bottling. The 2011 is pretty ripe, coming in at 14.1 percent alcohol, but is completely cool in the mouth and offers up a bright, vibrant and utterly classic nose of quince, lanolin, a touch of wet wool, a fine base of chalky soil tones and a touch of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with some of the chalky dusty elements of young Loire chenin, good acids, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This may well be the best example of chenin blanc I have ever tasted from California! 2015-2025+. **93**.

Chardonnay

2014 The Withers “Peters Vineyard Chardonnay (Sonoma Coast)

The 2014 Peters Vineyard cuvée is the first chardonnay that has been produced by Andrew Tow and his talented team at The Withers, and it is a beauty. The wine is cool and classy, coming in at an even thirteen percent alcohol and offering up a fine, youthful nose of pear, apple, lovely salty soil tones, a touch of almond, spring flowers and just a whisper of vanillin oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and focused, with a fine core, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the still fairly primary, but very promising finish. The wine was fermented and raised entirely in older casks, with only fifty percent going through malo, so that the wine retains a lovely tangy spine of acidity. It is an excellent young chardonnay that is quite tasty today, but will be even better with a year or two in the cellar. 2015-2020+. **91+**.

2013 Forman Vineyard Chardonnay (Napa Valley)

The 2013 Forman chardonnay is a young and very promising wine in the making, as it offers up impressive nascent complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a fine, youthful blend of apple, pear, a touch of tangerine, lovely soil tones, spring flowers and a very discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a fine core, zesty acids and lovely length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is going to be a terrific vintage of Forman chardonnay, but it is still a puppy and deserves at least a few years in the cellar to blossom and show some of its secondary layers of complexity. 2017-2035+. **93+**.

2013 Mount Eden Vineyards “Wolff Vineyard Old Vines” Chardonnay (Edna Valley)

The 2013 Mount Eden Vineyards “Wolff Vineyard Old Vines” bottling of chardonnay is absolutely beautiful, soaring from the glass in a complex and refined bouquet of pear, apple, a touch of beeswax, acacia blossoms, white soil tones and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On

the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very young and primary, with a fine core, bright acids and a tightly-knit, youthful personality that still needs a year or two in the cellar to really start to blossom. Aromatically, this wine is already very attractive, but it is a puppy on the palate and I would not touch a bottle until it has seen at least another year's worth of bottle age, as there are layers here just waiting to unfold. 2016-2030. **92.**

2013 Poe Vineyards "Ferrington Vineyard" Chardonnay (Anderson Valley)

The 2013 Poe Vineyards "Ferrington Vineyard" is really a beautiful bottle of low octane, pure and classy chardonnay. The superb nose delivers a complex mix of delicious apple, white peach, gentle notes of acacia and lemon blossoms, delicate leesy tones, salty soil and a discreet framing of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a superb core of fruit, bright acids, impeccably focus and grip and a long, vibrant finish. This is really a refined bottle of chardonnay that reminds me a bit of the wines Mike Grgich was making back in his heyday in the late '70s and early '80s. 2015-2020+. **93.**

2013 Porter Creek Vineyards "Russian River Valley" Chardonnay

The 2013 "Russian River Valley" Chardonnay from Porter Creek Vineyards is a lovely wine that wafts from the glass in a ripe and complex blend of apple, white peach, musky floral tones, beautiful alluvial soil nuances, a touch of almond and a very refined base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open in personality, with fine focus and grip, a lovely core, impressive focus and grip and a long, vibrant finish. This is 13.9 percent octane, but cool in the mouth and very refined in profile. Fine juice. 2015-2023. **91.**

2013 Radio-Coteau "Savoy" Chardonnay (Anderson Valley)

The 2013 Radio-Coteau "Savoy" chardonnay is a very nice wine, wafting from the glass in a ripe and complex blend of pear, apple, musky floral tones, citrus peel, a touch of nutskin and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, bright acids and a bit of backend heat poking out on the long and zesty finish. This is 14.1 percent alcohol and would have been even better at a lower octane, but it has fine depth and complexity and is a very well-made bottle. 2015-2020+. **89.**

2013 Trail Marker Wine Company "Manchester Ridge Vineyard" Chardonnay (Mendocino Ridge)

The 2013 Trail Marker Wine Company "Manchester Ridge Vineyard" chardonnay is an excellent example of low octane, soil-driven California chardonnay. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex and classy blend of green apple, lemon, salty soil tones, a touch of citrus peel, white flowers and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very soil-driven in personality, with a solid core, fine focus and grip and very good length on the nascently complex finish. This needs a year or two in bottle to blossom, but the foundation is here and this will be a lovely wine with a bit of patience. 2017-2030. **91+.**

2012 Domaine Eden Chardonnay (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2012 Domaine Eden Chardonnay is really a beautifully made bottle of old school chardonnay, offering up a pure and complex nose of apple, pear, acacia blossom, lovely soil tones and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite youthful at age three, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, a fine chassis of acidity and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex finish. At 13.5 percent alcohol, this wine is gently ripe and ample, but also nicely structured and will age very well indeed. Fine juice. 2015-2025. **90.**

2012 Porter Creek Vineyards “George’s Hill Vineyard Old Vine” Chardonnay

The 2012 old vine bottling from George’s Hill Vineyard is one of the finest chardonnays I have had the pleasure to taste from Alex Davis in several years (and he has made some stellar bottles over this stretch), as this is an absolute classic in the making. George’s Hill Vineyard is one of the top estate vineyards for Porter Creek, but a large portion of the vineyard has been replanted in the last several years and there remains only a fairly small parcel of old vines, from which this bottling was produced. The wine delivers a superb bouquet of pear, apple, gentle leesy tones, a superb base of soil, hazelnut and a refined framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a very long, nascently complex finish. This is only 12.7 percent alcohol and nicely discreet and racy as a result, so a couple of years of bottle age will allow it to fully blossom. A superb bottle. 2017-2027. **92+**.



Syrah (and Related and Unrelated Blends)

2014 Clos Saron “Blue Cheer” Red (Sierra Foothills)

The Blue Cheer cuvée from Clos Saron is comprised of a fifty-fifty blend of cinsault and carignan that were planted fully one hundred years ago. The grapes are foot-trodden and the wine is made without any “inoculations, acid corrections, additions, fining or filtration” and tips the scales at a very civilized thirteen percent. The bouquet on the 2014 Blue Cheer is excellent, delivering a blend of dark berries, chicory, a bit or roasted venison, campfires and a lovely topnote of gentle herb tones redolent of dried eucalyptus and rosemary. On the palate the wine is

full-bodied, complex and robust in personality, with a fine core, impeccable balance, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and superbly focused finish. This is high class juice. 2018-2035+. **92+**.

2014 Clos Saron “Out of the Blue” Red (Sierra Foothills)

The Out of the Blue bottling from Clos Saron is a bit different in terms of *cépages* than the Blue Cheer cuvée, as this wine is comprised almost entirely of cinsault that hails from a vineyard planted in 1880, with only two percent of syrah to add a bit of acid backbone to the blend. The 2014 Out of the Blue is excellent on both the nose and palate, with the complex bouquet offering up a combination of dark berries, roasted meats, pepper, incipient autumnal soil tones, a bit of bonfire, coffee and a nice touch of *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully structured, with fine focus and grip, ripe, chewy tannins and excellent length and grip on the tangy finish. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2040+. **93**.

2013 Arnot-Roberts Syrah “Clary Ranch” (Sonoma Coast)

The Clary Ranch bottling of syrah from Arnot-Roberts is very low octane in 2013, barely registering on the scales at 11.8 percent alcohol, but the wine delivers plenty of personality in its low octane, low fat format. The nose is deep and complex, offering up notes of cassis, black olive, pepper, woodsmoke, dark chocolate, cedar and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and youthful, with good mid-palate intensity, moderate tannins, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long and youthful finish. This wine is decidedly light in body for syrah, with more of the palate impression of good Beaujolais than most examples of syrah, but the wine has complexity and intensity of flavor, and if one is willing to dispense with the belief that syrah should *a priori* deliver weight on the palate, there will be plenty of pleasure to be had here down the road. That said, I would have loved to have seen this wine a bit riper and delivering just a bit more mid-palate stuffing out of the blocks, as for example, is found in the stunning 2013 Que Syrah Vineyard bottling from the domaine. 2019-2040+. **89+**.

2013 Arnot-Roberts “Que Syrah Vineyard” Syrah (Sonoma Coast)

The 2013 Arnot-Roberts “Que Syrah Vineyard” syrah is a fine bottle in the making, but this is still quite youthful in personality and will really want some bottle age to blossom properly. The primary bouquet wafts from the glass in a very promising mélange of cassis, black raspberry, leather, a touch of pepper, gamebirds, lavender and woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a fine core, ripe, chewy tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. All this superb wine needs is some bottle age! 2020-2050. **94**.

2013 Calder Wine Company Carignane “Colombini Vineyard” (Mendocino)

The 2013 Calder Wine Company’s Carignane from the Colombini Vineyard in Mendocino is a lovely bottle. These vines were planted in 1942, with the resulting wine fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised almost entirely in older oak (one barrel new out of nine) prior to being bottled in the late fall of 2014. The wine is 14.1 percent octane and offers up a superb nose of sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, a bit of grilled game, coffee grounds, soil and just a whisper of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, fine-grained tannins and a long, focused and nascently complex finish. A superb wine that is approachable today, but will be really hitting on all cylinders after a few years’ worth of bottle age. 2018-2040. **92+**.

2013 Clos Saron “La Onda” Red (Sierra Foothills)

The La Onda bottling from Clos Saron is comprised of a blend of sixty-three percent syrah and thirty-seven percent, old vine cinsault. The two varietals are co-fermented with

indigenous yeasts and raised in older oak casks. The 2013 came in at a cool 12.9 percent alcohol and offers up a youthfully complex and very promising bouquet of cassis, hung game, pepper, dark chocolate, and classic cinsault notes of coffee grounds and autumn leaves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with plenty of youthful structure, lovely mid-palate concentration, ripe, chewy tannins and excellent transparency on the long, nascently complex and perfectly balanced finish. This wine is going to need at least four or five years of bottle age to blossom, but it promised to be something very special once it has had a chance to drop some of its tannin and stretch its wings. Very classy, un-spoofulated *vin rouge*! 2020-2040+. **92+**.

2013 Day Wines “Running Bare” Mae’s Vineyard (Applegate Valley Oregon)

This is a field blend of Tannat, Côt and Cabernet Franc that comes in at an even thirteen percent in the 2013 vintage. The wine jumps from the glass with a fine bouquet of dark berries, cassis, a touch of chicory, cigar smoke, balsam boughs, spiced meats and a lovely base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very light on its feet, with a good core, excellent intensity of flavor, fine focus, modest tannins and a very long, tangy and complex finish. This is flat out delicious to drink now and shows the structure to also age very nicely for the next ten to fifteen years or more. Man, there are some very exciting wines being made under the radar in the US these days! 2015-2030. **92**.

2013 Day Wines “Hock and Deuce” Mae’s Vineyard (Applegate Valley Oregon)

The Hock and Deuce cuvée from Day Wines is comprised of a Côte-Rôtie-like blend of eighty percent syrah and twenty percent viognier. The nose is deep, pure and complex, offering up scents of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, a bit of grilled game, soil tones and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a rock solid core, great detail and complexity, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. This is a quintessential expression of soil-driven syrah and wines such as this should give *vignerons* in Côte-Rôtie food for thought. Great juice from a winery that is utterly new to me, but which I will be following attentively in the years to come! 2019-2045. **93+**.

2013 Drew Family Cellars Syrah “Valenti Ranch” (Mendocino Ridge)

Jason Drew began his career as a vineyard manager for top estates like Carmenet, before taking a sabbatical to study oenology in Australia at the University of Adelaide. Eighteen months later he returned to California to work as assistant winemaker, first with Cathy Corison in Napa and then at Babcock Vineyards in Santa Barbara. In 2004, he and his wife Molly purchased an old orchard on the Mendocino Ridge and planted their own vineyard. The 2013 Syrah “Valenti Ranch” from Drew Family Cellars is made from purchased grapes from this cool, foggy coastal vineyard and came in with an octane of thirteen percent. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of cassis, pepper, a touch of roasted game, Mendocino herb tones, dark chocolate and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthful, with a fine core, ripe, chewy tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, primary and promising finish. Given this very good bottle of syrah a good four or five years in the cellar to blossom. 2019-2040+. **90+**.

2013 La Clarine Farm “Piedi Grandi” (Sierra Foothills) Screwcap

The 2013 Piedi Grandi from La Clarine Farm is comprised of a blend of fifty-five percent nebbiolo, thirty-seven percent mourvèdre and eight percent syrah. The wine tips the scales at 13.9 percent octane and is quite cool in the moth, but was sealed under a screwcap. It remains pretty unaffected by its closure on the nose, but is already getting clipped and metallic on the backend from the screw’s penchant for reduction and should emphatically be decanted prior to serving. Once it is temporarily unlocked in decanter, the wine is really quite nice, offering up a complex nose of black cherries, woodsmoke, stony soil, a touch of new leather, meaty overtones

and *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately tannic, with excellent acids, fine focus and grip, a rock solid core and a long, complex and ever so slightly volatile finish. This is a unique and very well-made wine that would have tons to offer under natural cork, but will never get a chance to fully blossom structurally, for the reduction is going to eat this wine alive years before the tannins fully soften. Please, natural cork on the next vintage! As it is, the 2013 under screwcap needs to be drunk on the young side, where it is a tad primary, but still offers up plenty of personality once properly aerated. 2015-2016. **88.**

2013 Radio-Coteau “Las Colinas” Syrah (Sonoma Coast)

The 2013 Radio-Coteau “Las Colinas” Syrah is ripe, tipping the scales at 14.1 percent, but still very classically styled and really impressively balanced for its octane level and a very tasty example of its varietal. The deep and classic nose jumps from the glass in a fine blend of black raspberry, roasted meats, black pepper, bonfires, lovely spice tones, black olive and a fine underpinning of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, ripe tannins and a long, still fairly youthful and structured finish. This is very tasty today in its youth, but it is really built for the cellar and will be dramatically better with four or five years of bottle age. A superb bottle of syrah. 2019-2040+. **92+.**

2013 The Withers “Bel Canto”- (Sierra Foothills)

The 2013 Bel Canto bottling from The Withers is comprised of a blend of seventy-three percent grenache, twenty percent mourvèdre and seven percent syrah and comes, so it has nearly thirty percent more grenache in the cuvée than the 2010 version I reported upon in the last feature on American wines. The wine offers up a very pure and soil-driven nose of raspberries, pepper, lovely soil tones, *garrigue* and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely transparent, with a good core, ripe tannins, tangy acids and just a bit of heat on the long, and very Châteauneuf du Pape-like finish. This is 14.1 percent alcohol this year, and this is not too hot for the wine, but I would be very happy to see this a half percent lower in octane, as it would give just a bit more precision to the wine on both the nose and palate. But, that said, this is good juice. 2015-2025. **89+.**

2013 The Withers “Mr. Burgess”- (Sierra Foothills)

The 2013 cuvée “Mr. Burgess” from The Withers is comprised of a blend of seventy-five percent syrah, eighteen percent mourvèdre and seven percent grenache and was sourced as several of the top vineyards in El Dorado County, including the Wylie Vineyard and the Fenaughty Vineyard that fans of Edmunds St. John’s wines will already know so well. The wine offers up a deep and complex nose of red and black raspberries, grilled meats, pepper, again, a very good signature of soil, *garrigue*, a touch of chocolate and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, youthfully complex and chewy finish. This is 13.6 percent octane and built for the cellar and should age very nicely indeed. 2019-2040+. **90+.**

2013 The Withers “Ruben”- (Sierra Foothills)

The Withers’ bottling of “Ruben” was a new cuvée to me, as I did not taste this in preparation for the last article on American wines. This is primarily mourvèdre, with eighty-two percent of the blend comprised of this varietal, with the remainder made up of twelve percent syrah and six percent grenache. Like the Mr. Burgess and Bel Canto, this is all sourced from grapes in high elevation El Dorado vineyards (including again Wylie and Fenaughty) and raised in older casks, with no new oak utilized. The 2013 Ruben offers up a deep and black fruity bouquet of black cherries, cassis, a touch of tree bark, a good base of soil, meaty tones, fresh

herbs and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a fine core, excellent focus and complexity and a long, ripely tannic finish. Good juice that will need a few years in the cellar to soften up and start to drink at its apogee. 2017-2035. **91.**

2012 Calder Wine Company Charbono “Meyer Vineyard” (Calistoga)

The 2012 Calder Wine Company Charbono is a bit riper than the beautiful 2011 version, tipping the scales at a robust 12.6 percent alcohol (versus 12.1 for the 2011). There five and a half barrels produced in 2012, with one new cask used, and the wine offers up a superb bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, a bit of coffee grounds, a touch of grilled venison, woodsmoke and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and quite tangy, with a very fine core of fruit, impressive soil signature, a fair bit of chewy tannin and impeccable focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is just a dynamite bottle of wine and fully shows that more Charbono should be planted in California (there are only eighty acres remaining), as handled with the discretion of Rory Williams, this can be a very, very important varietal. Great juice. 2018-2035+. **93.**

2012 Edmunds St. John “Fenaughty Vineyards” Syrah (El Dorado)

The 2012 is the first vintage I can recall from Steve Edmunds of a straight syrah from the Fenaughty Vineyard, as in most vintages, this has been blended with fruit from the Wylie Vineyard. The wine is fairly ripe at 14.1 percent, but also very pure and soil-driven in personality, albeit, quite primary at this point in its evolution. The reticent bouquet offers up a classic, Clape-like nose of cassis, hung game, pepper, a bit of chocolate, fine base of soil, saddle leather and a nice touch of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, beautifully focused and still quite primary, with a fine core of fruit, lovely balance and grip, suave tannins and excellent length on the suave, tangy and classy finish. This could well age along the lines of the lovely Durell Vineyard bottlings of syrah from the 1990s, but it needs some time to allow its secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. 2020-2050. **94.**

2011 Sky Vineyards “Mount Veeder” Syrah (Napa Valley)

I know I am in the distinct minority, but I truly love the style and shape of the cool 2011 vintage in northern California, and the 2011 Sky Vineyards Syrah is yet again an lovely example of this underrated year. The wine tips the scales at a very suave twelve percent alcohol and offers up a bright and complex bouquet of red and black raspberries, pepper, a fine touch of grilled meats, a lovely underpinning of minerality, a bit of *garrigue* and a gentle topnote of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the focused and nascently complex finish. This is going to be a very good, low fat example of syrah. It is certainly quite approachable today, but it is still a puppy and needs another four or five years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. Fine juice. 2019-2035+. **91+.**



Zinfandel

2013 Nalle Winery Zinfandel (Dry Creek Valley)

The 2013 Nalle Zinfandel includes eight percent petite sirah and four percent carignane in the blend this year, with the wine coming in at 13.6 percent alcohol. However, the nose shows a few elements of *sur maturité* that suggests just a bit more octane in its mix of black raspberry jam, chocolate, hung game, brambly spice tones and a bit of forest floor. On the palate the wine is fullish, spicy and rock solid at the core, with tangy acids, moderate tannins and a long, slightly spiky finish that closes with a fair bit of backend heat. The lack of precision here on the backend strongly suggest a wine a bit higher in alcohol than 13.6 percent. This is not bad, but I have had far more exciting bottles of zinfandel from Doug Nalle in previous vintages. 2017-2027+. **87.**

Cabernet Sauvignon and Other Bordeaux Varietals or Blends

2013 Château la Grande Roche Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

The Château la Grande Roche Cabernet Sauvignon is made by Ric Forman and the 2013 comes in at an octane level of 14.5 percent and offers up a complex and youthful nose of black cherries, tobacco leaf, lovely soil tones, smoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite tightly-knit, with a good core, fine soil signature, firm tannins and a long, still very primary finish. This has all of the parts in place to really be a lovely wine, but it needs time in the cellar to blossom! 2021-2045+. **90.**

2012 Forman Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

I have tremendous respect for what Ric Forman has done over the course of his long and illustrious career as a winemaker in Napa Valley, and I have loads of his older wines in my cellar. However, his 2012 cabernet sauvignon is pretty ripe by the very high standards of his legacy, tipping the scales at 14.5 percent (and seems even a tad riper than this) and I really am a bit uncertain how it will age over the course of its life. The wine is certainly not overtly hot on the palate and the nose is excellent, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, cigar wrapper, lovely soil tones, a touch of fresh herbs and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core, firm, chewy tannins and very good length and grip on the slightly heady and very slightly dry-edged finish. The depth and complexity here are self-evident, but the wood tannins are not (yet?) well-integrated on the backend, and these may ultimately distract a bit as the wine ages. Perhaps this wine is just on the young side and will seamlessly integrate its components with further bottle age, but I would have loved to have seen it a full point lower in octane, so that there would be no questions of how it would evolve with long-term bottle age. I know that Ric has started to enjoy riper wines in the last few years, and it is pretty hard to argue with all of the inherent complexity of this wine, but one is still left wondering a bit just how good it will be a decade or two down the road. At the very least, it will be good, but it could be outstanding- only time will tell. 2024-2060+. **90-94?**

2012 Ex Libris Cabernet Sauvignon (Columbia Valley)

The 2012 Ex Libris Cabernet Sauvignon is still quite young, but it shows off good depth and structure and could blossom into a serious example of the varietal with some extended cellaring. The bouquet is still very primary in its blend of cassis, fresh herb tones, a touch of shoe polish, cigar ash and a judicious framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very youthful, with a good core of fruit, firm tannins and fine length and grip on the still tightly-knit and chewy finish. At this very early stage it is hard to say how nuanced it will be at maturity, but all of the constituent components are in place for a very good bottle of cabernet sauvignon with sufficient bottle age. 2021-2050. **90+**.

2012 Shinn Estate Vineyards Merlot (North Fork of Long Island)

The 2012 Shinn Estate Vineyards merlot is a very fine example of this varietal, coming in at a reasonable 13.5 percent octane and offering up a deep and youthfully complex bouquet of sweet dark berries, tobacco leaf, new leather, a nice touch of soil tones and a bit of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and complex, with a good core, ripe tannins and excellent focus and grip on the well-balanced and tangy finish. This is clearly a wine that finds its inspiration in old school Pomerol and will be a fine, fine bottle with a few years in the cellar. Impressive juice. 2019-2040+. **90.**

2012 Shinn Estate Vineyards Cabernet Franc (North Fork of Long Island)

The 2012 cabernet franc from Shinn Estate is a touch riper than their merlot, coming in at 13.8 percent alcohol and the wine pushes the envelope just a bit aromatically in terms of ripeness on the nose, delivering scents of black cherries, chocolate, a bit of prune, tar and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit hot on the backend, with a good core and nice structural elements, but more alcohol than is good for it poking out on the backend. It would seem that the good folks at Shinn Estate were a bit scared off by the typical leafy tones of ripe cabernet franc and let the grapes hang a bit longer than was beneficial. Let it be leafy... Given how good this estate's merlot is in 2012, it is quite clear that the team here has a vision of what they want; they just need to get the cabernet franc picked earlier than in the 2012 vintage. 2015-2020+? **83.**

2011 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2011 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon is a beautiful and utterly classic bottle in the making, with a cool vintage signature on both the nose and palate that is very, very exciting for long-term cellaring. For the record, the wine comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol, so it is far from underripe, and offers up a superb, primary bouquet of cassis, dark berries, cigar wrapper, great minerality, a touch of violet, bitter chocolate, a whisper of dried eucalyptus and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and gorgeously soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, firm, ripe tannins, outstanding focus and grip, seamless balance and a very, very long and nascently complex finish. This is a legend in the making, but like all truly great young California cabernets, this is going to need plenty of bottle age to really blossom and show all of its multi-faceted layers of complexity. 2025-2075+. **95+**.

Pinot Noir

2013 Poe Vineyards “Manchester Ridge Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Mendocino Ridge)

The 2013 Manchester Ridge Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Samantha Sheehan’s Poe Vineyards is really a very pretty and stylish bottle of young pinot, wafting from the glass in a complex aromatic constellation of black cherries, plums, fresh Mendocino herb tones, a touch of gamebird, dark soil tones and a discreet framing of nutty oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and fairly primary in personality, with a plush attack, fine core, modest tannins, bright acids and fine length and grip on the focused and nascently complex finish. This is going to be an excellent bottle of pinot, but I would tuck it away in the cellar for a few years and let it start to show some of its secondary layers of complexity. It is eminently drinkable right out of the blocks, but it is still a baby and really deserves some time in the cellar to stretch its wings! High class juice. 2015-2035+. **91+**.

2013 Poe Vineyards “Van Der Kamp Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Mendocino Ridge)

The pinot noir vines in the Van Der Kamp Vineyard are sixty years-old, and Samantha Sheehan has fashioned an outstanding bottle from them in the 2013 vintage. The wine offers up a deep and very complex nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a lovely base of soil, blossoming notes of cola, a bit of cardamom, woodsmoke and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely transparent and light on its feet, with a sappy core, fine-grained tannins, sound acids and lovely length and grip on the silky and vibrant finish. This is really a very, very pretty bottle of pinot noir. 2015-2035. **92**.

2013 Porter Creek Vineyards “Russian River Valley” Pinot Noir

The 2013 vintage of pinot noir from Alex Davis’ fine Porter Creek Vineyard comes in at an even thirteen percent alcohol and offers up a superb bouquet of red berries, cherries, fresh herb tones, a touch of beetroot, beautifully complex soil tones, a touch of nutskin and a very discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and beautifully transparent, with a lovely core of fruit, great focus and grip, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and vibrant finish. The last couple of vintages of Alex’s pinots that I have tasted have been a bit riper than customary, but the 2013 Russian River Valley bottling is utterly classical in profile and a stellar bottle of wine. This is very tasty already, but will be even better with a few years in the cellar. High class juice. 2017-2035+. **92+**.

2013 Trail Marker Wine Company “Saveria Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz)

The 2013 “Saveria Vineyard” pinot noir from the Trail Marker Wine Company is a lovely, high-toned example of the varietal, with a notably pale color that seems quite proper to go along with its 12.9 percent alcohol level. The bouquet takes a little time to blossom, but with a bit of air, wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of strawberries, beetroot, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of soil tones and a touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full and intensely flavored, with lovely transparency, good acids, just a whisper of tannin and outstanding length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This may not have quite the mid-palate weight that some tasters expect, but for those who value lightness of step and soil signature in their pinots, there is an awful lot to like in this still youthful wine. 2015-2030+. **90.**

2012 Domaine Eden Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2012 Domaine Eden pinot noir is pretty rip by the high and traditional standards of Mount Eden Vineyards, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol, but the wine is still quite vibrant on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a gently musky blend of baked cherries and strawberries, lovely spice tones, a touch of cocoa powder, stony soil and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a sappy core of fruit, good soil drive, modest tannins and a long, complex finish that shows just a whisper of backend heat at the close. I would have loved to have seen it a bit lower in octane, but it is very well-made and easy to drink. 2015-2025. **88.**

2012 Drew Family Cellars “Yorkville Highlands” Pinot Noir (Mendocino County)

The 2012 Drew “Yorkville Highlands” Pinot Noir is really a pretty and very transparent example of the vintage, tipping the scales at an even thirteen percent alcohol and offering up a pure and vibrant bouquet of red and black cherries, dark soil tones, bitter chocolate, a nice spread of Mendocino herb tones, gentle smokiness and a very refined base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with a good core, fine soil inflection, modest tannins and lovely focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is nicely light on its feet and drinking well out of the blocks, but with the balance to also age very well over the next fifteen to twenty years. Good juice. 2015-2030+. **91.**

2012 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate Bottled” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)

The 2012 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate Bottled” pinot noir is a full point lower in octane than the Domaine Eden bottling, and 13.5 percent alcohol is clearly a sweet spot for this vineyard. The bouquet is pure, focused and complex, jumping from the glass in superb blend of red and black cherries, a touch of grilled meat, black minerality, incipient notes of cola, woodsmoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very precise and soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the beautifully balanced and still quite primary finish. This will be an excellent bottle with sufficient bottle age. 2020-2045+. **92+.**

2012 Porter Creek Vineyards “Fiona Hill Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Russian River Valley)

The 2012 Fiona Hill Vineyard bottling from Porter Creek is a lovely bottle of ripe, well-balanced pinot noir that comes in at 13.9 percent and shows fine early succulence and complexity. The juicy bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex mélange of black cherries, plums, cola, lovely Goldridge soil tones, fresh herbs, woodsmoke and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a sappy core of fruit, fine focus and grip, lovely soil signature, moderate tannins and a very long, tangy and still quite primary finish. This is a plush and promising young bottle of pinot noir, and while it is

certainly approachable today, I would lobby for tucking it away for at least another four to five years and letting it truly blossom with some bottle age. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2045. **92+**.



2012 Radio-Coteau “Savoy” Pinot Noir (Anderson Valley)

The 2012 Savoy pinot noir from Radio Coteau offers up a fine bouquet, with depth and complexity, but at 13.8 percent alcohol, there is also a bit of backend heat to deal with on the palate. The excellent nose offers up a blend of black cherries, woodsmoke, a bit of meatiness, dark chocolate, chicory and a nice touch of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely velvety on the attack, with a fine core, moderate tannins, good acids and some warmth on the long and focused finish. This is really a very good example of its genre, with plenty of soil tones still in evidence and a good sense of balance, but at 13.8 percent, it seems pinot cannot seamlessly carry its octane unseen. But, this is very well-made in its style. 2015-2025+. **89.**

2012 Radio-Coteau “La Neblina” Pinot Noir (Anderson Valley)

The La Neblina bottling of pinot from Radio Coteau is a bit lower octane than the Savoy, coming in at 13.4 percent alcohol, and the wine is a bit more reserved in personality as a result. With some extended aeration, which the wine needs, as it is a touch reductive when first opened, it blossoms very nicely to offer up a black fruity nose of dark berry, charred wood, a bit of gamebird, espresso, fresh herb tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with tangy acids, ripe tannins and fine length and grip on the

tightly-knit, promising finish. This will need a few years to blossom, but should be very good indeed. 2018-2035+. **90+**.

2012 Senses “Sonoma Coast” Pinot Noir (Sonoma County)

The 2012 Senses “Sonoma Coast” Pinot Noir is a pretty and red fruity example of the vintage, offering up a bright bouquet of cherries, red plums, a touch of chocolate, gentle herb tones, a nice base of soil and a stylish framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and velvety on the attack, with a sappy core, nice soil signature and a long, bright and moderately tannic finish. This is still pretty primary on the palate and really could do with a handful of years in the cellar to start to develop its secondary layers of complexity, but it is quite accessible and tasty in its youth, so some folks will probably be very happy to drink this on the early side. Good juice. 2015-2035. **90**.

2012 Wenzlau “Santa Rita Hills” Estate Pinot Noir (Santa Barbara)

This 2012 Santa Rita Hills bottling from Wenzlau is only the winery’s second vintage of pinot noir, and it is a fine follow-up to the really lovely 2011 tasted last year. At an octane of thirteen percent the wine offers up just lovely purity on both the nose and palate, with the complex bouquet delivering a fine mélange of red and black cherries, a touch of beetroot, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke a lovely base of soil and a topnote of cola. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely silky on the attack, with a fine core, tangy acids, a nice chassis of fine-grained tannin and excellent length and grip on the youthful finish. This seems to have a bit more structure than the lovely 2011 version, as well as a bit more mid-palate depth, and it deserves a few years in the cellar to blossom. A beautiful bottle of Santa Barbara pinot! 2017-2037+. **92+**.

2010 Elke “Donnelly Creek Vineyard” Pinot Noir (Anderson Valley)

The 2010 Donnelly Creek Vineyard” pinot noir from Elke is pretty ripe at 14.3 percent, but the wine is only slightly hot on the backend and maintains very good freshness on both the nose and palate for its octane. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, chocolate, sarsaparilla, a dollop of stewed herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a plush core, modest tannins and a long, slightly warm finish. This is tasty, but not overly complex (probably because of its octane) and just a touch heady, but it is nicely proportioned and not a bad drink. 2015-2025. **88**.

**BE THE MATCH FOUNDATION
OCTOBER RED BURGUNDY TASTING**



A balloon rising up, as the sun starts to sink, over the spring vineyards in Pommard.

I had the pleasure to participate in a really superb red Burgundy tasting this past October that was donated to benefit the Be The Match Foundation, which registers potential bone marrow donors for patients afflicted with blood cancers such as Leukemia and Lymphoma. In conjunction with Dr. Nezih Cereb, a long-time friend, we put together the following lineup of red Burgundies from Dr. Cereb's cellar to be given to the Be The Match Foundation's annual auction to raise funds for this very worthy cause. I do not know if most readers are aware, but I am a cancer survivor myself, having had cancer when I was twenty years of age and having now been fully recovered for more than thirty-three years. Consequently, I am always willing to pitch in a hand when asked to help charities such as Be The Match to help other cancer patients have a chance to beat their disease, as I was so lucky to do all those years ago. When Dr. Cereb approached me about participating in this dinner tasting, and helping him to select the wines out of his excellent Burgundy cellar, I was more than happy to assist and we culled a very tasty lineup out of his deep collection. A few months later, a dozen of us gathered around the table in October to share a fine evening of great food and excellent red Burgundies to help support this worthy cause. In most cases, I would have saved notes from a tasting such as this to be integrated

into future vintage reports or domaine profiles, but it was such a lovely lineup of interesting wines, I thought it might be of interest to readers to report upon the wines as they were served, so as to have an opportunity to also highlight the good work that the Be The Match Foundation is doing in helping cancer victims find suitable bone marrow donors and giving them hope of perhaps defeating their disease.

When Dr. Cereb and I discussed which wines we would serve for the evening, I suggested that it would be interesting to not only pick the “best of the best” from his deep cache of Burgundies, but to offer interesting flights that would include top notch *villages* bottlings and some less well-known premier crus, in addition to a fine lineup of grand crus that would motivate bidders at the auction back in the spring of this year. The idea was to offer wines that were drinking well today, and which would stylistically work well with each other in each flight, so that the chef would have a similar band of aromatics and flavors with each set of three wines with which to match his courses. We finished up our lineup with three fully mature wines, but again revisiting the theme that ageworthy red Burgundy is not only the province of grand crus and the most famous of premier crus, we decided to show a couple of fully mature wines that are sleepers in today’s constellation of red Burgundies. As an interesting twist, we ended up drinking this fine lineup of Burgundies at one of Greenwich Village’s finest Italian restaurants, L’Artusi, whose kitchen turned out a superb meal that worked seamlessly with the Burgundies listed below. I suppose this is not really a surprise, as the restaurant’s wine program specializes in the wines of Piemonte, and there is really a natural affinity between Burgundy and Piemonte wines, so the chef was not really out of his element at all matching his fine cuisine with wines from the Côte d’Or. Many thanks to the superb staff at L’Artusi for making this very enjoyable evening so easy, as the team handled the wine preparation and service impeccably well and all I had to do was talk about the wines and enjoy the evening!

All the wines were double-decanted prior to the start of the dinner, and then uncorked fifteen minutes before the serving of each flight, so that no one at the table would be afflicted with a murky glass that included sediment. As I have written about in the past, the practice of not decanting older Burgundies is wrong-headed in my opinion, as I find the wines take very nicely to air when they are in the age group as our lineup for the Be The Match tasting, and in any event, when Burgundy is not decanted for dinners with as many as a dozen people, it is really only the first two or three people who are poured from each bottle that truly get to enjoy the wines as they should be, with everyone else having to fight through varying degrees of sediment in their wines. I have a bit of sympathy for the point of view that some of the aromatic complexity of a mature red Burgundy can be sacrificed by decanting, but feel that this is far more evident with wines that are more than fifty years of age, and in any case, not decanting a red Burgundy with significant sediment is simply impolite when there are twelve people around the table to share in each bottle! In many cases, I find that older Burgundies often suffer from insufficient air, rather than too much at many tastings, for with these wines, as is the case with many wines that depend more upon acidity than tannin for their structural stability over the long haul, a bit of aeration really allows the wines to blossom harmoniously on the palate. I am also firmly of the opinion that the tradition of not decanting Burgundy came about simply because most Burgundian farmers, back in the nadir of the region’s economic fortunes, simply could not afford decanters in the first place and tradition sprung up from necessity, rather than from the conviction that the wines were better served straight from the bottle. Others may interpret the

history of the region differently in this regard, but on this evening, where my preferences for the wine service were granted, all of the following wines were decanted. In any event, it was a delightful evening and seemed to warrant a brief feature on its own, as the flights of wines really worked very well together for each course and may give readers thoughts for pairing of bottles at tastings of their own down the road.

First Flight

2000 Volnay- Domaine Michel Lafarge

The 2000 Volnay *villages* from Michel and Frédéric Lafarge is drinking beautifully at age fifteen and has blossomed into a classic example of the village. The very red fruity nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, raspberries, woodsmoke, gentle spice tones and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and complex, with superb transparency, a fine core, melting tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. Really a lovely wine that has developed beautifully structural precision with bottle age. 2015-2035+. **91.**

2000 Vosne-Romanée- Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg

This particular bottle of Vosne AC from the Mugneret sisters was oddly “flat” on the palate and I wonder if the cork had let go a bit and allowed a bit of oxidation into the wine. The nose is complex, but not as vibrant as the last several bottles that I drank of this wine, as it offers up scents of plums, cherries, cocoa powder, soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and velvety, with good depth at the core, little remaining tannin, pretty low acids and a slight touch of oxidation on the reasonably long finish. There are still some nice components here, but I have had fresher bottles of this recently. 2015-2020. **87.**

1990 Morey St. Denis- Domaine Jacky Truchot

Jacky Truchot made some of my favorite wines in the 1990 vintage and his Morey *villages* is still drinking marvelously well at age twenty-five. The deep and complex nose jumps from the glass in a blend of black cherries, roasted venison, forest floor, mustard seed, coffee, lovely soil nuances and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and vibrant, with a fine core, excellent *terroir*, little remaining tannin and excellent length and grip on the tangy and beautifully focused finish. This is one 1990 that shows no overripeness and is really a superb bottle. 2015-2030. **91.**

Second Flight

2000 Nuits St. Georges “Chaignots”- Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg

The 2000 Chaignots from Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg has just reached its apogee and is drinking marvelously today. The deep, complex and very pure nose offers up a fine blend of black cherries, red plums, a touch of gamebird, a complex base of soil, a touch of violet, coffee and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a sappy core of fruit, outstanding soil inflection, modest, seamless tannins and outstanding focus and balance on the very long and very refined finish. Chaignots is one of the most elegant premier crus in all of Nuits St. Georges and this quality is very much on display in this beautiful example from the Mugnerets. 2015-2040+. **92+.**

1998 Nuits St. Georges “Chaignots”- Domaine Robert Chevillon

The 1998 Chaignots from Bertrand Chevillon is a very fine example of the vintage, with the sturdy tannins of the year falling away nicely at age seventeen and the wine starting to drink with superb style and complexity. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, a touch of pomegranate, venison, chocolate, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of nutskin and

vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and complexity, melting tannins, good acids and fine soil signature on the long, classy finish. Really a lovely bottle of Chaignots. 2015-2040. **92.**

1993 Pommard “Clos des Épenots”- Domaine Courcel

The 1993 Clos des Épenots from Domaine Courcel is a superb bottle, and one of the last “classically styled” Burgundies produced at this estate, as not long after this vintage, the domaine started producing wines in a modified Guy Accad method. In any event, the 1993 Clos des Épenots is absolutely classic and is just starting to blossom at age twenty-two, offering up a deep and nascently complex nose of cherries, quince, gamebirds, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke, a touch of cedar and an excellent base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with a superb core, excellent focus and grip, ripe tannins and a long, blossoming and complex finish. The tannins are just starting to fall away here and the acids are starting to peel back nicely and allow the wine to blossom fully, but this took a good fifteen minutes or so in the glass, after the wine had been decanted for a good half hour, so this is still very early days for this excellent bottle of Pommard. It will drink even better five more years down the road. 2015-2050+. **92+.**

Third Flight

2000 Gevrey-Chambertin “aux Combottes”- Domaine Jacky Truchot

Jacky Truchot’s 2000s are some of my favorite bottles from this very underrated vintage, and his Combottes is now drinking with great style and breed on its fifteenth birthday. The outstanding and utterly classic nose wafts from the glass in a red fruity mélange of cherries, strawberries, beetroot, mustard seed, gamebird, *sous bois*, woodsmoke and marvelous soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and tangy, with great intensity of flavor, outstanding balance, melted tannin, bright acids and great focus and grip on the very long and complex finish. This is a quintessential example of the Truchot house style of complexity and intensity without undue weight, and the wine should continue to drink beautifully for another couple of decades. 2015-2035. **93+.**

2000 Chambolle-Musigny “les Cras”- Domaine Georges Roumier

Christophe Roumier’s 2000 les Cras is just reaching its apogee at age fifteen and is starting to drink with a lot of class and complexity. The bouquet delivers a fine constellation of red and black cherries, mustard seed, gamebirds, a touch of violet, dark chocolate, chalky soil tones and a nice touch of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with excellent soil inflection, fine focus and balance, melting tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. Just a lovely bottle that is entering its plateau. 2015-2035+. **93.**

2001 Vosne-Romanée “Cros Parantoux”- Domaine Emmanuel Rouget

Emmanuel Rouget’s 2001 Cros Parantoux is a very good example of the vintage that has aged better than I initially imagined it would. The wine is still quite defined by its generous serving of smoky new oak, but there is a lot of fine fruit, spice and soil tones here to balance out the new oakiness. The nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of raspberries, red plums, Vosne spices, venison, lovely soil tones, coffee and plenty of smoky new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with excellent complexity and balance, modest, well-integrated tannins, good acids and fine length and grip on the voluptuous finish. I would, of course, have liked this wine even better with slightly less new wood, but it is an

excellent bottle in any case and is really starting to drink well at age fourteen, but clearly will continue to cruise along for at least a couple more decades to come. Good juice. 2015-2035+. **93.**



Fourth Flight

2000 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Jacky Truchot

I had not tasted the 2000 Truchot Clos de la Roche in several years, as I bought more Charmes for my own cellar, and I was quite surprised to see how beautifully the Clos de la Roche is drinking today, as my bottles of Charmes (after a long and glorious period of generosity) have currently closed down again for a bit of hibernation. However, this is not the case with the 2000 Clos de la Roche, which is at its zenith and offers up a stunningly expressive nose of cherries, beetroot, mustard seed, roasted venison, a beautifully complex base of soil, woodsmoke and just a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and in full bloom, with a gorgeous core of fruit, glorious soil inflection, modest tannins and a very, very long, focused and tangy finish. Just a great bottle of Clos de la Roche that should continue to cruise along for decades, but is now fully into its plateau of peak maturity. A stunning wine. 2015-2040+. **95.**

1999 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Armand Rousseau

To my mind, the 1999 vintage is really a watershed for this bottling *chez* Rousseau, as from this point forwards, the wine has seemed to gain a bit in terms of mid-palate intensity with each passing vintage. The bouquet on the 1999 is starting to really show lovely layers of

secondary complexity in its sappy mélange of red and black cherries, grilled meat, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones and a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely plushness on the attack, modest tannins, good acids and a very long, focused and classy finish. This is probably still climbing a bit and will be even better with a few more years bottle age, but it is drinking with great style today and if one has more than a few bottles in the cellar, it is a very good time to start enjoying this wine. Fine juice. 2015-2050+. **93+**.

1991 Musigny “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de Comte De Vogüé

The last bottle I tasted of the 1991 Musigny “Vieilles Vignes” from Comte De Vogüé was quite a bit more roasted and almost malty in personality than this bottle, and I am not sure if my last bottle was not entirely pristine, or if the wine is just starting to emerge from an extended period of adolescence and is offering more precision and complexity at age twenty-four than it did at age twenty. In any case, this bottle was really quite lovely, albeit, still crafted in the more extracted style that was prevalent at the domaine in this era, as it offers up a deep and complex nose of red and black cherries, a touch of blood orange, woodsmoke, gamebird, lovely herb tones, coffee, soil tones and smoky new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine complexity and soil signature, melting tannins, sound acids and excellent length and grip on the fairly powerful, but well-balanced finish. This is so much more enjoyable than the last few bottles of this wine that I tasted that I have hopes it is really starting to blossom and will prove to be far better than I initially anticipated. 2015-2045. **93**.

Fifth Flight

1989 Echézeaux- Domaine Emmanuel Rouget

I count myself very lucky to have been able to drink a fairly good number of wines from Henri Mayer during his career, and though I have now finished up my last bottles in my own cellar, I still always get excited when I cross paths with one these days. As readers may recall, back in 1989, Monsieur Mayer made most of the wines bottled under his nephew Emmanuel Rouget’s label, with the Rouget Echézeaux being a blend of wine from Henri’s parcel, his brother George Mayer’s parcel, as well as possibly some of the Echézeaux production from brother Lucien Mayer as well (with Lucien making his own wines and sharing half with Monsieur Rouget under a classic sharecropping agreement). I am not sure if this was a blend of all three Mayer brothers’ Echézeaux, or if Emmanuel Rouget would bottle each separately, rather than make a blend, but the wine really showed its Henri Mayer signature in its glorious bouquet of sappy plums, black cherries, spit-roasted venison, forest floor, black truffles, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and flamboyant on the attack, with a plush core, melting tannins, excellent acids and superb length and grip on the focused and beautifully refined finish. Great juice. 2015-2040. **96**.

1986 Morey St. Denis “Clos de la Bussière”- Domaine Georges Roumier

Christophe Roumier made lovely 1986s and his Clos de la Bussière is drinking with great style and complexity at age twenty-nine. The pure and complex nose wafts from the glass in a fully mature blend of red and black cherries, *sous bois*, venison, herb tones, woodsmoke and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tertiary in personality, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, suave and meltingly tannic finish. This wine has been fully mature for a decade or more, but is still very vibrant and shows plenty of life still ahead of it. Fine juice from an underrated vintage. 2015-2035+. **91**.

1978 Nuits St. Georges “Premier Cru”- Maison Pierre Bourée

Ironically, given that this wine is already thirty-seven years of age, the 1978 Nuits St. Georges Premier Cru from Maison Bourée was still a tad on the young side and showed a touch of reduction when first poured, which took a good fifteen minutes to blow off and allow the wine to really blossom. Once it had opened up, it was lovely, offering up a nobly rustic profile on both the nose and palate that was very enjoyable. The bouquet is a blend of black cherries, cassis, roasted game, a touch of nutskin, *sous bois* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a very good core, fine soil signature, still a whisper of tannin and very good length and grip on the well-balanced and complex finish. This is very tasty today, but may still continue to improve with further bottle age. 2015-2035+. **90+**.

THE 2014 BEAUJOLAIS VINTAGE ADDENDUM MORE FINE BOTTLES ARRIVING ON THIS SIDE OF THE ATLANTIC



Given how lovely the 2014 vintage in Beaujolais is for current drinking or extended aging, I was very pleased to hear from several importers that many examples of the vintage from some of my favorite estates were destined for early autumn arrival here in New York. Naturally, I jumped at the chance to taste these new arrivals and revisit the vintage in some depth, so here we have an addendum to the first piece on the vintage that appeared a couple of issues back. I have also included notes on other vintages of Beaujolais that I have tasted since the article appeared two issues ago, so there are some notes on 2013s and older wines to be found here as well. I tend to drink a fair bit of Beaujolais in the summer and autumn, as I always know that I have a total immersion in Burgundy on my agenda for November and it is nice to drink wines with a different *cépages* prior to diving in deep in the Côte d'Or, and the really fine 2014 Beaujolais should prove to be an excellent preparation to tackling that vintage a bit further north in the coming month. As I noted back in Issue 57, the 2014 vintage is the finest in Beaujolais since the 2011s, and is quite differently styled than that year, with more of an upfront fleshy fruitiness to the wines, which contrasts quite nicely with the atypically structured Crus of 2011. As a friend with a great palate commented about the 2014s, they have almost too much early seductive appeal, but as one follows a wine in the glass or bottle, it seems pretty clear that the

2014 version is going to offer up more structural integrity in the long run than the same wine might have in the more over the top year of 2009 in the region, and in the end, the wines should age very well indeed. It has been many years, but the 2014s may well age as well as the top wines from 2002 did in Beaujolais, and if this ends up being the case, we will all be happy to have some in our cellars a decade down the road.

Beaujolais Blanc

2014 Beaujolais Blanc- Lucien Lardy

Lucien Lardy's Beaujolais Blanc is made from sixty year-old chardonnay vines and raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. The 2014 version is a lovely wine, offering up a bright and complex nose of apple, a touch of tangerine, a nice base of soil, a hint of straw and a pungent topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a plump core, sound acids and fine length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. More complexity will emerge here with a bit more bottle age and this wine offers up impressive depth and polish for its price point. Fine juice. 2015-2020+. **89.**

2014 Beaujolais Blanc- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2014 Beaujolais Blanc from Domaine du Vissoux is a very pretty bottle of chardonnay, but it is sealed with a plastic cork and will want drinking on the early side as a result. The bouquet offers up a bright and youthfully complex blend of apple, white peach, chalky soil tones, a touch of fresh almond and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and wide open in personality, with a fine core, sound acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. A lovely bottle for near-term consumption. 2015-2018. **89.**

Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages

2014 Beaujolais-Villages- Damien Coquelet

Damien Coquelet really makes beautiful Beaujolais-Villages, and his 2014 is a very worthy successor to his excellent effort with this cuvée in 2013. The purity of 2014's fruit is very evident in this vibrant example, which soars from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, beautiful soil tones, gentle smokiness, violets and a dollop of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and intensely flavored, with just a touch of tannin, good acids, lovely transparency and a long, light on its feet finish. This is very low octane, coming in at only eleven percent, but is very well-balanced and a lovely middleweight. 2015-2022. **89.**

2014 Beaujolais "Beau!"- Loron et Fils (screwcap)

The 2014 version of "Beau!" Beaujolais from Loron et Fils is really good wine, and I know that the screwcap is all part of the modern packaging scheme for the wine, but why risk such superb juice with an inferior closure? There is just a whisper of incipient reduction in evidence on the nose already, and more on the backend of the palate, but the raw materials here have such fine quality, that the reductive aspects are still in the background and there is a lot of pleasure to be had here for the moment. The deep and sappy nose offers up scents of black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of violet, a good base of soil and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is medium-full and plush on the attack, with a sappy core, nice balance, but already starting to get just a touch thin and short on the backend from the screwcap. Good juice, bad closure. 2015-2016. **88.**

2014 Beaujolais-Villages “Vieilles Vignes”- Château de la Terrière

The 2014 Beaujolais-Villages “Vieilles Vignes” bottling from Château de la Terrière, which looks out at the Mont de Brouilly, is very good example of the vintage, jumping from the glass in a deep and complex nose of sweet cranberries, black cherry, fresh herb tones, a bit of pepper, oak leaves and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nicely structured for a Beaujolais-Villages bottling, with a lovely core, a touch of tannin and fine length and grip on the bouncy and beautifully balanced young finish. I would be inclined to give this another six months or so in the cellar to allow it to really blossom fully, as it really has fine depth and structure for its appellation. 2016-2025. **87+**.

2014 Beaujolais “Coeur de Vendanges”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The hundred year-old vines that make up the Coeur de Vendanges cuvée from Pierre-Marie Chermette have really excelled in the 2014 vintage, as this has to be one of the very finest 2014s I have yet tasted from the region! The simply stunning nose delivers a complex constellation of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of fresh nutmeg, a gorgeously complex base of soil, incipient autumnal notes, a bit of nutskin and perhaps just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and intensely flavored, with a lovely core, great tangy bounce, outstanding focus and grip and a very, very long, modestly tannic and vibrant finish. This is not a blockbuster by any stretch of the imagination, but is so energetic and seamless on the palate as to rank right up there with some of the very best Cru bottlings from this outstanding Beaujolais vintage. *Chapeau* Monsieur Chermette! 2015-2030. **93+**.

2013 Beaujolais-Villages- Domaine Stéphane Aviron

The 2013 Beaujolais-Villages from Stéphane Aviron is a very pretty and stylish middleweight. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mélange of strawberries, cherries, woodsmoke, sweet herbs and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, long and quite suave on the attack, with solid depth, bright acids and lovely grip and bounce on the juicy finish. This is a nice, honest bottle of Beaujolais-Villages that works very well at the table. 2015-2020+. **88**.

Saint Amour

2014 Saint Amour- Domaine de la Pirolette

The Domaine de la Pirolette can trace its history as a winemaking estate all the way back to 1600, and in the 2013, this venerable estate was purchased by the Barbet family (of nearby Domaine des Billards) and other partners. The 2014 Domaine de la Pirolette is a lovely bottle of St. Amour, delivering a fine and youthfully complex nose of red and black cherries, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a nice touch of nutskin, fresh herbs (mostly sage) and espresso. On the palate the wine is pure, vibrant and tightly-knit, with its full-bodied format showing a good chassis of tannin, bright acids, a fine core and impeccable balance on the long, nascently complex and tangy finish. This is going to be an excellent bottle of St. Amour, but it is built for the cellar and needs a year or two more of bottle age to really start to drink with generosity and secondary nuance. 2017-2030+. **91**.

2009 St. Amour Clos des Billards “Réserve Caveau”- Domaine des Billards

I had not tasted a bottle of the 2009 Clos des Billards “Réserve Caveau” since January of 2012 and was delighted to have a chance to cross paths with another bottle in preparation for this report. As readers may recall, this wine is fermented with one-third of the stems and hails from a section of old vines in the vineyard that traditionally produce the most structured and long-lived

wine, with the Barbet family holding it back for at least five years in their cellar prior to release. At age six the wine is starting to develop some secondary layers of complexity, wafting from the glass in a deep, fairly black fruity nose (particularly for St. Amour) that delivers a complex blend of black cherries, dark berries, espresso, autumnal soil tones, a bit of roasted venison, walnuts, just a whisper of fresh herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex, with a sappy core of black fruit, superb soil signature, tangy acids, still a bit of tannin and a very long, focused and modestly chewy finish. This is a dynamite bottle of black fruity St. Amour that is now entering its plateau of maturity, but should cruise along at this very high level for at least fifteen years or more. Great juice. 2015-2030+. **94+**.



The old goblet-trained vines in the St. Amour vineyard of the Domaine des Billards.

Chénas

2014 Chénas “Vignes de 1939”- Pascal Aufranc

Pascal Aufranc’s 2014 Chénas “Vignes de 1939” hails, as the name suggests from vines that were planted in 1939 and with the 2014 vintage celebrated their seventy-fifth birthday. The wine offers up a deep and nicely primary bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, granite soil tones, incipient autumnal notes, a bit of nutskin and a nice touch of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure on the attack, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance, a dollop of backend tannin and very good length and grip on the youthful finish. Most Chénas is ready to go upon release, but Monsieur Aufranc’s old vine cuvée could do with a

couple of years' worth of bottle age to fully blossom. Good juice in the making. 2017-2030+. **90+**.

2014 Chénas “les Deschamps”- Yohan Lardy

The 2014 Chénas “les Deschamps” from Yohan Lardy, who is a new producer to me, is really quite fine, with plenty of depth of fruit and soil signature. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a plush blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, a touch of oak leaves, fresh herbs and just a whisper of cardamom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and velvety on the attack, with a fine core, a bit of tannin, good acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. There is a very discreet streak of youthful *herbacité* here that runs through the core of the wine here that may put off some tasters, but which will add to the wine's complexity with a bit of bottle age. 2015-2025. **88**.

2013 Chénas “Vieilles Vignes”- Stéphane Aviron

The Chénas bottling from Stéphane Aviron is produced from a parcel of one hundred year-old vines that he has sourced grapes from since 1993. The wine is produced with no carbonic maceration and with its *elevage* taking place in older Burgundy casks that range from one to four years of age. The 2013 is a very pretty example of this cru, but with some nice underlying structure on the palate to carry it for several years in bottle. The vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, sweet cranberries, a touch of gamebird, vinesmoke, a good base of soil tones, just a touch of cedar and a nice mix of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and complex, with a good core of fruit, a fair bit of tannin and a long, tangy and still quite youthful finish. This is a very, very good bottle of Chénas, with impressive old vine stuffing, but it really will deserve another year or two's worth of bottle age to start to soften on the palate. 2017-2030. **92+**.

Juliénas

2013 Juliénas “Vieilles Vignes”- Stéphane Aviron

The 2013 Juliénas from Stéphane Aviron is more forward structurally than his Chénas, as it hails from older vines that are “only” fifty years of age (in comparison to the hundred years-plus for his Chénas). The wine offers up lovely aromatic and flavor complexity in a succulent and bouncy format. The complex nose offers up a mélange of cherries, pomegranate, nutskin, excellent soil tones, a hint of raw cocoa and a discreet topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a fine core, a bit of backend tannin and lovely length and grip on the focused finish. Good juice that is drinking well out of the blocks, but which has the underlying chassis to keep very nicely and will be even better with a bit more bottle age. 2015-2025. **91**.

2013 Juliénas- Domaine du Clos du Fief (Michel Tête)

The 2013 Juliénas from Michel Tête shows just a touch of youthful pyrazines on the nose and palate, but it is only a dollop and will add a lovely savory element to the wine with some extended bottle age. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, sweet cranberry, vinesmoke, a lovely base of soil, pepper, crushed violets and a topnote of juniper berry. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and intensely flavored, with a touch of *herbacité*, modest tannins, tangy acids and lovely soil drive on the long and complex finish. If pyrazines bother you, this is probably not your bottle of Juliénas, but if you are less sensitive, there is an awful lot to like in this elegant and complex example of the vintage. 2015-2025. **89**.

2013 Juliéna “Cuvée Prestige”- Domaine du Clos du Fief (Michel Tête)

Domaine du Clos du Fief’s 2013 Juliéna “Cuvée Prestige” is really a beautiful example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a classic blend of dark berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, a very good base of soil tones that will turn autumnal fairly briskly, a hint of acorn and a topnote of black pepper. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and tangy, with a fine core, a bit of tannin, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and very nicely balanced finish. This is still a tad on the young side and will blossom nicely with a bit of bottle age, but it is also very easy to drink right out of the blocks with heartier dishes that ameliorate a bit of tannin. 2017-2030+. **90+**.

2012 Juliéna “Tête de Cuvée”- Domaine du Clos du Fief (Michel Tête)

The 2012 Juliéna “Tête de Cuvée” from Michel Tête’s Domaine du Clos du Fief is already fully mature and showing some fine secondary nuances on both the nose and palate. The bouquet has some autumnal elements to be found amongst its mélange of dark berries, pepper, acorns, marjoram, forest floor and a touch of coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and a bit peppery on the backend, with a good core, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the complex, but fairly short finish. The 2012 vintage is one of the two most difficult in the region in the last decade, but this wine has turned out quite well and is drinking nicely at the present time- albeit with some of the peppery and autumnal nuances of the vintage. Not bad. 2015-2023. **88**.

Moulin-à-Vent

2014 Moulin-à-Vent “Les Brussellions”- Louis Boillot

Louis Boillot is one of the finest *vignerons* in Chambolle-Musigny and I have been looking forward very much to tasting his first vintage from Moulin-à-Vent. His 2014s have proven to be very much worth the wait, as they are lovely examples of their *terroir* and the vintage and definitely built to age long and gracefully. The Les Brussellions bottling hails from a parcel of old vines planted on red granite soils, and is raised in a combination of stainless steel and *demi-muids*. The bouquet on the 2014 wafts from the glass in a pure and nascently complex blend of black cherries, dark berries, fresh thyme, French roast, a beautiful base of dark soil tones, woodsmoke and just a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and primary, with a fine core, superb transparency, ripe tannins, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the soil-driven and still quite youthful finish. This very impressive example of Moulin-à-Vent needs time in the cellar to blossom, but it is a terrific wine in the making. 2018-2050. **92+**.

2014 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes”- Louis Boillot

Louis Boillot’s holdings in Moulin-à-Vent hail from his grandmother and it is so exciting to see that he is now producing wines here in this outstanding cru. The 2014 Vieilles Vignes bottling offers up a deep and utterly classic bouquet of cassis, black cherries, fresh herb tones, gamebirds, a beautiful base of dark soil, a touch of chicory and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a fine core of black fruit, excellent soil signature, moderate, ripe tannins, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and energetic finish. The balance here is impeccable, which makes it quite approachable already, despite the fact that it is clearly built for long-term aging and will be far better to drink with four or five years’ worth of bottle age under its belt. Excellent juice. 2018-2050. **93+**.

2014 Moulin-à-Vent “Les Trois Roches”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2014 Moulin-à-Vent “Les Trois Roches” from Domaine du Vissoux is a beautiful wine in the making, wafting from the glass in a youthful blend of cassis, dark berries, gamebird, a complex base of dark soil tones, campfire, French roast fresh herbs and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with impeccable focus and balance, ripe tannins, good acids and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and very promising finish. This is still quite primary and needs some time in the cellar to blossom, but will be outstanding with a bit of bottle age. 2019-2040+. **93+**.

2013 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes”- Stéphane Aviron

Monsieur Aviron sources his grapes for his Moulin-à-Vent from four small parcels of old vines in the appellation, with vine age ranging from sixty-five to one hundred years of age. Like all of the Cru Beaujolais bottlings from Stéphane, the wine is fermented in stainless steel and raised in a combination of newer and older Burgundy barrels. The 2013 Moulin-à-Vent delivers a deep and utterly classic bouquet of black currants, woodsmoke, espresso, dark soil tones, incipient notes of gamebird, a touch of wood-spice, fresh herbs and a nice framing of nutty oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully delineated, with a fine core, moderate tannins and lovely balance on the long, complex and very, very promising finish. This is proper Moulin-à-Vent and should have a very long life in bottle. It is certainly approachable today, but is still quite primary in personality and I would want to tuck it away in the cellar for at least a few years and allow it to truly start to blossom. Fine, fine juice. 2017-2045+. **93**.

2011 Moulin-à-Vent “Cuvée de la Lure”- Château de la Terrière

The 2011 Moulin-à-Vent “Cuvée de la Lure” from Château de la Terrière is a fine example of this deep and structured vintage, offering up a pure and still quite youthful bouquet of cassis, French roast, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, incipient notes of gamebird and a touch of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite pure on the attack, with a rock solid core, excellent soil inflection and a fair bit of tannin (as is so typical of the top wines from the 2011 vintage) on the long and nascently complex finish. This wine needs a few years in the cellar to start to stir, but will be excellent in the fullness of time. A very fine and quite classically styled bottle of young Moulin-à-Vent. 2018-2040+. **91+**.

2009 Moulin-à-Vent “Champ de Cour” Réserve Caveau- Xavier et Nicolas Barbet

The 2009 Moulin-à-Vent “Champ de Cour” Réserve Caveau from Xavier et Nicolas Barbet is one of the first wines that the family has produced by aging the wines in Burgundy casks, with a percentage of them new. The wine is aging beautifully and offers up excellent complexity today on both the nose and palate, with a nice, gentle signature of new wood perfectly integrated into the wine. The complex bouquet is still on the young side, but developing very nicely and currently offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, a fine base of dark soil tones, coffee grounds, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, incipient notes of *sous bois* and a nice framing of nutty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a touch structured on the backend, with a plush attack, a sappy core, excellent soil signature, still a fair bit of chewy tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused finish. With a red meat dish that will ameliorate a bit of its still youthful tannin, the wine is very, very enjoyable to drink today, but it is still climbing and really needs another three or four years’ worth of bottle age to more fully drop its tannins to reach its absolute apogee, but it is aging very gracefully and is loaded with promise. It should prove to be one of the longest-lived bottlings of the vintage. 2018-2050. **93+**.



Fleurie

2014 Fleurie “Chavot”- Julie Balagny

As I noted a couple of issues ago, Julie Balagny has only been producing wines in Beaujolais since 2009, when she relocated from Provence and settled in with a few parcels in Fleurie. She is not a fan of chapitalization or later harvesting, so her wines tend to be lean and racy in style. Her 2014 bottling of Fleurie “Chavot” is a bit riper than the two 2013s I reviewed in the last Beaujolais feature (both under eleven percent), as this 2014 comes in at a robust 12.2 percent alcohol and consequently has a bit more mid-palate depth. The wines is a touch reductive on first opening and needs some aeration to blossom, but eventually offers up a deep and complex nose of red and black cherries, dark soil tones, a bit of campfire, gamebird and espresso. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, focused and nicely balanced, with a solid core, lovely soil signature, sound acids, very gentle tannins and good length and grip on the intensely flavored finish. This has far more universal appeal than Mademoiselle Balagny’s extremely low fat 2013s and is a very tasty bottle of Fleurie, albeit, still cut in the purist style of the natural wine movement. 2015-2023. **90.**

2014 Fleurie “Les Garants”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2014 Les Garants from Pierre-Marie Chermette’s Domaine du Vissoux is a superb young wine, with great balance and mid-palate depth and plenty of underlying structure to carry it far into the future. The bouquet offers up a primary constellation of pomegranate, red and

black cherries, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil, incipient notes of gamebird, fresh herbs and just a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very elegant on the attack, with a sappy core, lovely soil signature, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the suave and tangy finish. This is a terrific glass of wine already, but clearly there is more complexity to unlock here if one can exercise just a bit of patience. 2015-2025+. **93.**

2014 Fleurie “Poncié”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The 2014 Poncié from Domaine du Vissoux is a gorgeous and utterly classic vintage for this cuvée, with a bit more in reserve than the utterly flattering 2014 Les Garants. The nose jumps from the glass in a stellar blend of black cherries, sweet cranberry, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of espresso, a bit of squab, fresh thyme and bitter chocolate. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and really solid at the core, with beautifully velvety fruit tones, a great base of soil, tangy acids, just a bit of backend tannin and outstanding bounce and grip on the very long and complex finish. Great juice in the making. 2015-2030. **94.**

2014 Fleurie “Cuvée Tardive”- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2014 Clos de la Roilette “Cuvée Tardive” is a fine, fine bottle in the making, but as is customary with this cuvée, it is far more bound up in its structure out of the blocks than the regular Clos de la Roilette and will want a few years in the cellar to start to blossom. The bouquet is deep and youthfully complex, offering up scents of red and black cherries, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, violets, a touch of raw cocoa, fresh sage, peppercorn and hints of the nutskin to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely sense of sappiness in the core, a fair bit of well-integrated tannin, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long and still quite unevolved finish. A fine bottle in the making, but give it a bit of bottle age. 2019-2040+. **93+.**

2014 Fleurie “les Roches”- Lucien Lardy

The 2014 Fleurie “les Roches” from Lucien Lardy is a classic example of old school Fleurie, with a fine combination of impending generosity and backend soil signature. The bouquet offers up scents of pomegranate, black cherries, a touch of violets, fresh herb tones and dark soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a good core, a bit of backend tannin to resolve and fine bounce and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. I really like the size and shape of this wine and would bet that a year in the cellar will really allow it to blossom nicely, but it is still a touch young today to show all its qualities. 2016-2026. **89.**

2014 Fleurie “le Vivier”- Yohan Lardy

The 2014 Fleurie from the *lieu à dit* of “le Vivier” from Yohan Lardy is a tasty bottle of this cru, with a nice balance between the exuberance that Fleurie can show in a ripe vintage such as '14 and the structure of a wine that is meant to age. The bouquet offers up a youthful blend of black cherries, fresh herb tones, dark soil, a touch of espresso and hints of the forest floor to come. On the palate the wine is fullish, fairly tight and nicely concentrated, with a fair bit of tannin for a Fleurie, good focus and grip and a long, primary finish. I do not know where the vineyard of le Vivier is located, but I suspect it is not too far from Moulin-à-Vent, as there is certainly some shared characteristics here. 2016-2023+. **87+.**

2014 Fleurie- Julien Sunier

The 2014 Fleurie from Julien Sunier is very nicely high-toned in aromatic profile for wines of this village, wafting from the glass in a bright bouquet of cherries, strawberries, fresh thyme, lovely soil flavors, coffee and a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and tangy, with a fairly tightly-knit personality for a 2014 Fleurie, good mid-palate concentration, just a bit of tannin and a long, vibrant and still quite primary finish. This is a lovey

wine, which is tasty now in its middleweight and youthful format, but should deepen and broaden on the palate with a bit of bottle age. I really like its backend energy. 2016-2030+. **91+**.

2014 Fleurie- Château de la Terrière

Château de la Terrière's 2014 Fleurie is a lovely wine that shows excellent depth and nascent complexity, coupled with a good chassis of structure and a more reserved personality that will want a bit more bottle age to start to blossom. The deep and primary nose wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, dark berries, oak leaves, dark soil tones, incipient notes of gamebird and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite tightly-knit, with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and still fairly reticent finish. I am not sure where the vineyards are for this bottling of Fleurie, but it seems likely that they are over towards Moulin-à-Vent, given the structural style of this promising wine. But, give it some time to blossom! 2016-2030. **89+**.

2013 Fleurie- Domaine de la Madrière (Stéphane Aviron)

Stéphane Aviron's 2013 Fleurie is sourced entirely from the Domaine de la Madrière, whose steep hillside vineyards are located on the western side of the appellation, in the direction of Chiroubles. Monsieur Aviron ferments the wine in stainless steel and then raises it in Burgundy barrels, with a small percentage new and the remainder one or two wine casks. The 2013 is just a touch reductive when first opened and needs a bit of air to blossom, but does so to offer up a complex and quite red fruity (particularly for Fleurie) bouquet redolent of cherries, cranberries, vinesmoke, a touch of oak leaf, fine soil signature, a bit of cedar and a topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tightly-knit and fairly complex, with a good core, just a bit of *herbacité*, modest tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. This is quite a typical 2013 Cru Beaujolais and will enjoy a year or two in the cellar to blossom more fully, but will always be cut in a leaner style that will work very well at the table, but will never offer a whole lot of fat or stuffing, despite lovely intensity of flavor. 2016-2025+. **89**.

2013 Fleurie "Griffe du Marquis"- Clos de la Roilette (Alain Coudert)

The 2013 Griffe du Marquis bottling from Clos de la Roilette is still a fairly young and slightly weedy wine and a few years in the cellar are certainly warranted. The precise and complex nose wafts from the glass in a bright, detailed, but notably weedy blend of cherries, pomegranate, pepper, a superb base of dark soil, plenty of herb tones, vinesmoke and a touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tightly-knit and laser-like in its focus, with a very good core, moderate tannins, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the very well-balanced and youthful finish. This needs at least three or four years of cellaring to really blossom, but the depth, complexity and balance here are very impressive and the wine should age beautifully. That said, if pyrazines bother you, perhaps this is a vintage of Griffe du Marquis that you may want to pass on, as I suspect it will always be at least a touch weedy in profile, even when all of the secondary layers of complexity emerge with extended aging. But, there are certainly some stellar components here as well for those of us who are less sensitive! 2018-2035+. **92+**.

Chiroubles

2014 Chiroubles "Chatenay"- Daniel Bouland

The 2014 vintage is the first to bear the name of the *lieu à dit* of Chatenay on the label of Monsieur Bouland's fine bottling of Chiroubles. The wine is absolutely outstanding in this vintage, offering up a pure, complex and youthfully vibrant nose of cranberries, cherries, a touch

of blood orange, bonfires, lovely soil tones, gamebirds, fresh thyme, nutskin and a topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tangy and beautifully balanced, with outstanding mid-palate depth, moderate tannins, lovely purity and focus and a very long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is accessible, but more tightly-knit than the 2013 was out of the blocks, and this can only augur well for its future longevity in the bottle. Just a beautiful young bottle of Chiroubles that is built to age long and gracefully. 2015-2035. **92+**.

2014 Chiroubles- Damien Coquelet

Damien Coquelet's bottlings of Chiroubles are amongst my absolute favorite expressions of this underrated cru, and the 2014 "regular" cuvée is excellent. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, gamebird, woodsmoke, a touch of espresso and a gentle topnote of black pepper. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and sappy at the core, with moderate tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, low fat and nicely soil-driven finish. This is only eleven percent alcohol, but shows much more mid-palate stuffing and structural integrity for cellaring than Monsieur Coquelet's "light as a feather" Beaujolais-Villages bottling from this vintage. A serious example of Chiroubles. 2015-2025+. **91**.

2013 Morgon "Vieilles Vignes"- Damien Coquelet

The 2013 Vieilles Vignes bottling of Chiroubles from Damien Coquelet is quite a bit deeper-pitched than his Morgon "Côte du Py" cuvée in this vintage, offering up a complex nose of black cherries, cassis, charred wood, gamebirds, a touch of coffee bean, a fine base of soil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely wide open structurally, with a good core, some chewy backend tannins and a long, slightly flat, but complex finish. This is a very low or non-sulfur bottling and the wine seems a touch advanced right now for its age and I would suggest that drinking it over the near-term is the most prudent course of action. But, the wine is quite tasty and will be very enjoyable to drink over the next several years. That said, it seems to me the wine would be better off with a bit more SO₂ used during the *elevage* and bottling, so that it could demonstrate some of the long-term potential obviously inherent here. 2015-2020. **89**.

Régnié

2014 Régnié- Georges Descombes

The 2014 Régnié from Georges Descombes is a lovely bottle of Cru Beaujolais, offering up a bright and sappy nose of black cherries, sweet cranberries, vinesmoke, a nice touch of granitic soil, incipient notes of gamebird and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and very well-balanced, with a fine core and soil signature, bright acids and a long, modestly tannic finish. As Monsieur Descombes is based in Villié-Morgon, it is not too surprising to find his Régnié bottling to possess good structural elements and a fine base of soil. Fine juice that should age very well indeed. 2015-2025+. **89+**.

2014 Régnié "Haute Ronze" Vieilles Vignes- Jean-Michel Dupré

This "Vieilles Vignes" bottling from the *lieu à dit* of Haute Ronze is Jean-Michel Dupré's is actually his younger vine version of Régnié, as he also has a cuvée produced from this cru that is made exclusively from vines planted in 1918! However, this is also a blend of good old vines as well and the 2014 is a lovely and sappy example of the vintage, with a fine core, good focus and bounce on the backend and plenty of charm on both the nose and palate. The exuberant bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of black cherries, pomegranate, a nice touch of granite, woodsmoke, a hint of the autumnal leaves to come and a topnote of graphite. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and round, with a fine core, tangy acids and lovely focus and

balance on the succulent finish. This is really a lovely bottle of Régnié that is light on its feet and drinking with fine generosity out of the blocks, but which will age nicely over the coming decade or more. 2015-2025+. **90.**

2014 Régnié- Antoine Sunier

The 2014 vintage is the first for Antoine Sunier, who is the younger brother of Julien Sunier. He has produced two wines in 2014- Régnié and Morgon, which his brother was instrumental in helping him locate, so that the Régnié comes from parcels that average forty-five years of age (and the Morgon sixty-plus). The wine is lovely, having been raised primarily in older Burgundy casks and offering up a deep and vibrant nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, dark soil, a dollop of fresh herbs and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite sappy at the core, with fine soil signature, just a whisper of tannin and fine length and grip on the complex finish. An impressive debut wine. 2015-2025. **90.**



2014 Régnié- Julien Sunier

Julien Sunier's 2014 Régnié is a very pretty and red fruity example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, cranberry, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of discreetly autumnal soil tones, a nice touch of spices and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with a good core, modest tannins, bright acids and good length and grip on the still quite primary finish. It is early days for this fine

bottle of Régnié and I would be tempted to at least give it a year in the cellar to come forward a bit more from behind its structural elements, but that is not to say that it is not very tasty already. 2016-2025+. **90+**.

2014 Régnié “Cuvée Nature”- Château de la Terrière

The Régnié “Cuvée Nature” from Château de la Terrière is produced without any added sulfites during the *elevage* and bottling process. I always worry about this methodology for aging, but it is quite clear that at least for near-term drinking, there is a lot of pleasure to be had here with this 2014. The wine delivers a fine aromatic constellation of cassis, black cherries, dark soil tones, a touch of bitter chocolate and a bit of acorn in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and nicely balanced, with a solid core, a bit of backend tannin and very good focus and grip on the long, tangy finish. This is pretty structured out of the blocks for a young example of Régnié and it will be interesting to see how it ages over the longer haul, but for drinking at least over the next five to seven years, this will be a lovely wine. It may end up aging even longer, but time will tell. 2015-2022+? **89**.

Morgon

2014 Morgon “Bellevie” Schiste- Daniel Bouland

The 2014 Morgon “Bellevie” Schiste from Daniel Bouland is a new bottling from the domaine and is absolutely lovely in 2014. The bouquet offers up a fine mix of cherries, pomegranate, gorgeous minerality, fresh herbs, a touch of orange peel and incipient notes of gamebirds. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and very transparent, with a lovely core of red fruit, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and excellent length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. A classic bottle of Morgon that will need a couple of years to fully blossom. 2017-2035. **92**.

2014 Morgon “Corcelette” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Daniel Bouland

2014 Morgon “Delys”- Domaine Daniel Bouland

The 2014 Delys bottling from Daniel Bouland is outstanding, which is only fitting in a fine vintage and vines that were planted in 1926! The bouquet offers up a deep and still fairly primary constellation of black cherries, sweet dark berries, charred wood, granitic soil tones, a touch of French roast, fresh thyme, incipient notes of gamebird and just a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, tangy and absolutely rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, ripe tannins, superb balance and a very, very long, energetic and still quite youthful finish. This is a long distance runner that is approachable today, but is really built for the very long haul and it is tantamount to a crime to even consider opening bottles of this wine today (beyond necessary research!), for this is going to be a monument in the decades to come. Utterly brilliant young Morgon! 2020-2060+. **94+**.

2014 Morgon- Georges Descombes

The 2014 Morgon from Georges Descombes is a deep and properly structured bottle of young Morgon, wafting from the glass in a primary blend of cherries, blood orange, cranberry, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, granitic soil tones and a touch of peonies in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, transparent and nicely soil driven, with a fine core, modest tannins, tangy acids and very good length and grip on the still youthful and slightly weedy finish. This is certainly approachable today, but it really deserves a few years in the cellar to start to blossom and drink with the generosity that will most assuredly come with bottle age. 2017-2030+. **90+**.

2014 Morgon- Antoine Sunier

The 2014 Morgon from Antoine Sunier is aged in a bit lower percentage of used Burgundy casks than his Régnié (eighty percent versus ninety), with the balance of the cuvée raised in epoxy-lined cement tanks. These old vines have produced an excellent and quite classic Morgon in 2014, wafting from the glass in a fine aromatic blend of black cherries, cassis, fresh thyme, campfires, a superb base of dark stony soil tones, incipient autumnal notes and a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with lovey focus and grip, fine transparency and just a bit of backend tannin on the very long and perfectly focused young finish. Fine, fine juice in the making. 2015-2035. **92.**

2014 Morgon- Julien Sunier

Julien Sunier's 2014 rendition of Morgon is a young and very, very promising example of its village and this lovely vintage, offering up a deep, nascently complex and very precise bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, fresh thyme, granite, a touch of espresso and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a fine girdle of acidity, ripe, buried tannins and excellent length and grip on the primary, pure and gently chewy finish. This needs time to unwind, but will be excellent with a bit of bottle age! Like his Fleurie, there is simply gorgeous backend energy in this young wine. 2020-2050. **93+.**

2013 Morgon "Côte du Py" Vieilles Vignes- Stéphane Aviron

The 2013 Morgon "Côte du Py" Vieilles Vignes bottling from Stéphane Aviron is a fine example of this excellent *climat*, wafting from the glass in a youthfully complex nose of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of mustard seed, coffee, a bit of sweet walnut, stony soil tones and a framing of cedar from its *elevage* in Burgundy barrels. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and nicely structured, with a good core, ripe tannins, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the long, nascently complex and soil-driven finish. This needs a few years in the cellar to blossom, but should age very nicely and prove to be an excellent example of Côte du Py with a bit of bottle age. 2018-2035. **91+.**

2013 Morgon "Côte du Py"- Damien Coquelet

The 2013 Morgon "Côte du Py" bottling from Damien Coquelet is a touch volatile on the nose when first poured, but blossoms nicely with a bit of air to offer up a bright and red fruity aromatic constellation of cherries, quince, woodsmoke, soil, gamebirds and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and transparent, with a good, but not great core of fruit, lovely focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, complex, but fairly low acid finish. While there remains a bit of tannin here, I get the sense that the wine is fairly fragile structurally and will probably be at its best in the next several years. I could be wrong of course, but this wine strikes me as an example of Côte du Py that is not destined to make old bones. But, there is certainly plenty of pleasure to be had here over the relative short-term. 2015-2020+? **88.**

2013 Morgon "Vignes de 1935"- Domaine Dupré

The Morgon "Vignes de 1935" bottling from Jean-Michel Dupré also hails from the *lieu à dit* of Grand Cras at the base of the Côte du Py. As the name suggests, this parcel was planted in 1935 and was closing in on eighty years of age in the 2013 vintage. Monsieur Dupré does not de-stem and ages the wine for nine months in cement tanks prior to bottling. The 2013 is excellent, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, a touch of sweet cranberry, woodsmoke, a touch of gamebird, fresh herb tones, a lovely base of soil and a bit of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and vibrant, with a fine core, a bit of firm backend tannin to resolve, bright acids and very good length and grip on the still quite

primary finish. This is a bit bound up in its structure today and could use a couple of years in the cellar to fully come into its own, but it will be excellent wine if given a bit of patience. 2017-2035+. **91+**.

2013 Morgon “Grand Cras”- Laurent Gauthier

The 2013 Morgon “Grand Cras” from Laurent Gauthier hails from a *lieu à dit* that lies at the foot of the Côte du Py and Monsieur Gauthier has seventy year-old vines in this vineyard. He de-stems this wine about eighty percent and ages it for nine months in big, old traditional *foudres*. The 2013 is an excellent wine, with depth, soil signature and excellent structural integrity, as these old vines have excelled in this vintage. The bouquet is a deep and still quite youthful blend of black cherries, dark berries, a lovely and complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke, just a bit of fresh thyme and espresso. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, bright acids, a bit of backend tannin and excellent intensity of flavor on the very long finish. This is not the most concentrated examples of Morgon, but it is transparent, complex and utterly classic in style. Fine juice from a domaine that is completely new to me. 2015-2035+. **92**.

2012 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Georges Descombes

The 2012 Vieilles Vignes bottling from Georges Descombes (remember that this does not appear anywhere on the label, as the old vine cuvée is simply differentiated by a heavier bottle and sealing with red wax, rather than a capsule) is really an outstanding example of this vintage, offering up a deep and complex nose of cassis, black cherries, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of mustard seed and a bit of espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open for inspection, with a very good core, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, complex and slightly flat finish. This is another low or no sulfur bottling and it is going to probably need drinking up on the early side, despite the stuffing and tannic chassis to cruise along far longer if it had seen a bit more SO₂ during its *élevage*. However, this is one 2012 that does not suffer from any of the vintage’s *herbacité* and really possesses some lovely attributes. 2015-2022+? **91**.

Brouilly

2014 Brouilly “Pierreux”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)

The Pierreux bottling of Brouilly from Pierre-Marie Chermette hails from the southern part of Brouilly appellation, just to the east of the village of Odenas, and perhaps this accounts for its structural integrity and inner core intensity that really seems more like Côte de Brouilly than most examples of the easier going Brouilly. In the 2014 vintage, these traits are very much in evidence, as the wine offers up superb aromatic complexity and mid-palate depth, with the wine wafting from the glass in a fine blend of pomegranate, cherries, vinesmoke, a lovely signature of soil, nutskin and just a whisper of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and nicely reserved, with a fine core, modest tannins, fine acidity and a very long, still fairly primary finish. I really like the size and shape of this wine, which could use just a bit more time to unwind properly, but which will be a terrific glass of Brouilly when it really starts to hit on all cylinders. 2016-2025+. **92+**.

2014 Brouilly- Georges Descombes

The 2014 Brouilly from Monsieur Descombes is a lovely synthesis of Brouilly’s youthful generosity and the more structurally-aligned sensibilities of one of Morgon’s top *vignerons*. The bouquet is deep, pure and very nicely soil-driven in its blend of red and black cherries, a touch of

nutskin, excellent soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of the autumnal elements to come and peonies. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and shows a nice touch of sappiness at the core, with lovely complexity, good acids, just a touch of backend tannin and fine focus and grip on the long finish. Lovely juice. 2015-2022. **89+**.

2014 Brouilly “l’Enfer des Balloquets”- Robert Perroud

This bottling of Brouilly takes its name from the very steep hill of Balloquets, which is traditionally a “hell” for harvesters each autumn. The 2014 from Robert Perroud offers up a deep and quite black fruity (particularly for Brouilly) nose of black cherries, dark berries, charred wood, dark soil tones and a bit of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a bit structured out of the blocks, with a good core of black fruit, nice soil signature and a bit of tannin to resolve on the long and tangy finish. This is a serious bottle of Brouilly that will be even better with another year’s worth of bottle age. 2015-2025. **89**.

2014 Brouilly- Château de la Terrière

The 2014 Brouilly from Château de la Terrière shows off the depth and ripe fruit of the vintage, but delivers this is a very nicely structured format that augurs quite well for its future development. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine constellation of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh thyme, gamebirds, a bit of coffee and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows a nice touch of sappiness at the core, with a fine soil signature, just a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and bouncy finish. A lovely example of Brouilly. 2015-2028+. **91**.



2013 Brouilly “Corentin”- Laurent Martray

Laurent Martray took over the family domaine in 1987, where he is blessed with all old vine parcels, so that his youngest vines are now more than fifty years of age! The Brouilly “Corentin” bottling hails from some of his oldest parcels, with the vine age for this cuvée ranging from eighty to one hundred years of age! He raises his wines in a combination of old *foudres* and two to five year-old Burgundy casks and bottles without filtration. The 2013 Martray Corentin is a stunning bottle of Brouilly, soaring from the glass in a sappy and serious constellation of black cherries, sweet cranberries, a touch of oak leaf, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke and a hint of bitter chocolate in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and almost creamy in texture on the attack from the old vine fruit, with a fine core, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the complex and modestly tannic finish. Very high class Brouilly! 2015-2030+. **92+**.

2013 Brouilly “Combiaty” Vieilles Vignes- Laurent Martray

Though the Combiaty bottling of Brouilly is labeled as “Vieilles Vignes”, this is actually from Monsieur Martray’s youngest vines, which of course are still fifty years of age. This bottling is raised entirely in *foudres*. The wine is lovely in 2013, delivering a vibrant aromatic blend of sweet dark berries, black cherries, a touch of espresso, fresh herb tones, dark soil and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely sappy as well at the core, with lovely nascent complexity, sound acids and a long, refined and velvety finish. Clearly, this is the bottling of Brouilly to drink sooner, while allowing the even older vines in Corentin to develop with a bit more bottle age. 2015-2025. **91**.

Côte de Brouilly

2014 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Mélanie”- Daniel Bouland

The 2014 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Mélanie” from Daniel Bouland is a superb follow-up to the 2013 version, which I loved a year ago. Monsieur Bouland’s parcel of vines here lie adjacent to those from Château Thivin, with this barrel-fermented version of Côte de Brouilly soaring from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, gentle meatiness, stony soil tones, woodsmoke, espresso, fresh thyme and just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and utterly seamless, with a sappy core of fruit, outstanding soil inflection, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and still fairly primary finish. This wine is so beautifully balanced that it is very, very easy to drink right now, but it will be even better with a couple of years in the cellar and should easily keep twenty-plus years. *Chapeau!* 2015-2035+. **93+**.

2013 Côte de Brouilly “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Stéphane Aviron

Stéphane Aviron’s 2013 Côte de Brouilly is a quite classic example of this fine *terroir*, as the wine offers up a bright and nascently complex nose of cherries, woodsmoke, coffee, nutskins and a very refined base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and intensely flavored, with a good core of red fruit, lovely mineral drive, tangy acids and just a touch of backend tannin perking up the long and intensely flavored finish. Good juice that should age very well. 2015-2025+. **90**.

2013 Côte de Brouilly “les Feuillées”- Laurent Martray

The 2013 Côte de Brouilly “les Feuillées” from Laurent Martray is produced from a range of vines running from sixty years-old to one parcel that was planted in 1916! The wine’s *elevage* is in a combination of *foudres* and two to seven year-old Burgundy casks, like his Corentin bottling of Brouilly, and it too is bottled without filtration. The 2013 les Feuillées is built for the long haul and is a bit reductive out of the blocks, taking some coaxing in the glass to

offer up a deep and black fruity nose of cassis, oak leaves, stony soil tones, bonfire and a bit of pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly tightly-knit, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, low fat and tangy finish. This does not have the charm out of the blocks of either of Monsieur Martray's Brouilly bottlings, but my gut instinct is that a few years in the cellar will let this wine unwind properly and it will prove to be excellent. 2017-2035. **91+**.

2012 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine de la Voute des Crozes (Nicole Chanrion)

I had not opened a bottle of Madame Chanrion's 2012 Côte de Brouilly in about fifteen months and was very happy to see how nicely it is evolving in the bottle. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of black cherries, fresh thyme, a bit of dark chocolate, woodsmoke, incipient notes of *sous bois* and a nice touch of stoniness. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and well-balanced, with its youthful tannin now nicely resolved, fine focus and grip and a long, suave and black fruity finish. This is not as red fruity in personality as most vintages of this wine, but the cooler fruit tones of 2012 work nicely here and this is a very suave middleweight that is now at its apogee and is one of my favorite examples of this difficult vintage. 2015-2020+? **90**.