

# VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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- ❖ *Edmunds St. John- Setting the Table For California's Rhône Varietal Renaissance.* (pages 1-13)
- ❖ *The Annual Loire Valley Report- Focusing On the 2015 Vintage.* (pages 14-38)
- ❖ *A Look Back At the Fine 1985 Vintage in the Northern Rhône.* (pages 39-45)
- ❖ *More From Champagne, Including a Horizontal Report on the Outstanding 1996s.* (pages 46-90)
- ❖ *A Handful More 2015 and 2014 New Releases From Beaujolais.* (pages 91-99)
- ❖ *A Quick Look At Some of the Top 2013 Côte-Rôtie Classicists.* (pages 100-105)
- ❖ *A Cornucopia of Beautiful New Releases From America's Neo-Classical Maestros.* (pages 106-145)
- ❖ *A Fine Horizontal Tasting Of the 1990s From the Produttori del Barbaresco.* (pages 146-151)
- ❖ *A Few 2014 Red Burgundies From Domaines That I Did Not Visit in March.* (pages 152-157)

## *Coming Attractions*

- ❖ *Round Two of Kalin Cellars- America's Great Iconoclast Traditionalist.*
- ❖ *Twelve Years Out, How the Superb 2004 Piemonte Vintage is Faring In Bottle.*
- ❖ *Cathy Corison's Understated and Utterly Superb Rutherford Bench Cabernets.*
- ❖ *François Cotat's Superb, Old School and Very Ageworthy Sancerres (Rosé Too).*
- ❖ *A Taste For Campania's Beautiful and Ageworthy White Wines.*
- ❖ *The 2015 Vintage In Burgundy, Richard Olney's Extraordinary Life In Wine, The Mâconnais, Ric Forman, Gérard Boulay's Sancerres, Château La Lagune, The Hill of Corton, Château Ausone, More Off the Beaten-Path Italian Wines, Château Montrose, Champagne Bruno Paillard, Spanish Wines, More 2015 Beaujolais and Château Musar.*

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**EDMUNDS ST. JOHN- SETTING THE TABLE  
FOR CALIFORNIA'S RHÔNE VARIETAL RENAISSANCE**



During my late August trip out to San Francisco, I had the great pleasure to join Steve Edmunds of Edmunds St. John for a deep vertical tasting of his syrah bottlings and a nice selection of other oldies dating back to some of his very earliest vintages. Readers may recall my historical profile on the wines of Edmunds St. John back in the summer of 2010, which detailed the rise of this important California producer and the seminal role played by Steve Edmunds in the awakening of the market to the beauty of Rhône varietal bottlings from California. Steve and his wife Cornelia founded their winery in 1985, taking advantage of all of the good, often old vine, plantings of grapes such as grenache, mourvèdre and syrah that were available at the time to fashion the most dynamic examples of California Rhône style wines of the 1980s and 1990s. The wines have remained consistently excellent since those very earliest days down to the present time and I was fortunate to be a wine merchant back when Steve first launched his Edmunds St. John label and I sold his wines from his very earliest vintages. I always believed that these impeccably balanced wines were built for long-term cellaring, but having never being disciplined enough to keep my hands off of the bottles in my own cellar, I jumped at the opportunity to join Steve and a few friends on a beautiful day in Berkeley to sample a very deep and impressive range of Edmunds St. John bottlings. I will not outline the long history of

Edmunds St. John in this piece, having done so a few years back, but for new subscribers who have not seen the piece, I would be happy to forward it to you.

As our tasting progressed, Steve commented that “I am really a bit surprised at just how young some of these wines remain, as even some of the earliest vintages still show a bit of tannin and have plenty of life still ahead of them.” This was indeed the case with the superb wines in our lineup, with each and every wine (with the possible exception of one old zinfandel, which was fully resolved and a few folks felt was getting to the far side of its plateau) showing outstanding development and complexity, but also still plenty of depth and stuffing and the potential to continue cruising along for many years to come. While our primary focus was on the various syrah bottlings that Steve has fashioned over the years, there were a nice handful of vintages of his Châteauneuf du Pape-styled blends in the tasting as well, which has worn a couple of different names on the label over the years, having started out as “Les Côtes Sauvages” and then transitioning to “Rocks and Gravel”. It proved to be every bit as ageworthy as his superb examples of syrah. We also had a couple of Edmunds St. John white wines as well sprinkled in over the course of our afternoon, to serve as taste breaks and very pleasantly remind us that this is not a “red wine only” estate! I have grouped together and listed those notes at the end of the article, despite their having been opened at various points over the course of our festivities.

One of the interesting things that was shown during the course of our afternoon of immersion in these superb wines from Edmunds St. John is how consistent the house style of the wines has proven across a wide variety of different vineyard sources over the years. This no doubt is directly tied to Steve’s desire from the outset to produce wines of *terroir* that reflected their underlying soil types, rather than his own winemaking style. Additionally, he has always been drawn to cooler climate vineyards for his various contracts, as these are the ones that produced the most beautiful expressions of their underlying soils, so that while the underlying soils have changed over the years as vineyard sources came and went for the various Edmunds St. John bottlings, the overall style of the wines at this superb estate has remained quite constant, and these are clearly the standard by which everyone else’s syrah bottlings are measured in California today. And, as the notes below will attest, Steve Edmunds has set the bar very high for syrah and other Rhône varietally-based bottlings in California, and the great wines that have emerged year after year from Edmunds St. John since the very earliest vintages of the mid-1980s have blazed a trail that a great many other producers have followed with great success in most recent times. I continue to be astonished that syrah and other Rhône styled wines in California are not even more popular in the market than they are at the present time, but this I attribute to all the flabby, syrupy, monster truck-styled renditions of syrah that flooded the market back in the early years of this millennium and caused immense confusion with consumers perceptions of what California syrah could and should be. I am not surprised that those dismal wines did not find much market traction, but I am surprised that the lower octane, classic styles of syrah such as Steve Edmunds crafts have not found a stronger following. For they are truly stunning and utterly classic wines (oftentimes more classic than many of their counterparts at certain addresses in the Rhône Valley itself these days) that magically embrace the passage of time.

### ***Assorted White Wines***

#### **2015 Heart Of Gold- Edmunds St. John (Screwcap)**

The 2015 Heart of Gold bottling from Edmunds St. John is really drinking beautifully out of the blocks, wafting from the glass in a low octane and vibrant mix of pear, coriander seed, lovely soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and vibrant, with a fine core and a long, focused and zesty finish. This is a beautiful middleweight that is ideal for gentle sipping as an aperitif or with a wide variety of food. It is a blend of fifty-three percent Vermentino and forty-seven percent Grenache Blanc this year and tips the scales at 11.5 percent alcohol! 2016-2018+. **89.**

#### **2004 Roussanne “Tablas Creek Vineyard”- Edmunds St. John**

The 1994 Roussanne that Steve sources from Tablas Creek Vineyard is really a terrific wine and one that still has many years of life ahead of it. It is funny, but when I tasted this wine six years ago, I was not convinced, as it was closed and a bit hot (having come in at 14.5 percent alcohol). Steve noted that he barrel-fermented this wine in old puncheons and bottled it after only three months of cask aging, as he did not want the wine to lose any of its cut and grip. After bottling, he continued, “the wine was really tight for the next five or six years and we really could not drink it,” but it eventually started to blossom and has been drinking very well now for the last half few years. The difference between the bottle I tried in 2010 and this most recent bottle was night and day and demonstrated emphatically how much the wine has blossomed in the interim. The bouquet is pure and lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, a touch of fresh almond, chalky soil tones, candied lemon peel and a nice topnote of beeswax. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, bright and long, with a fine core, moderate complexity and lovely focus and balance on the classy finish. Man, did I underrate this wine back in 2010! 2016-2030. **91.**

#### **1997 Viognier “Alban and Durell Vineyards”- Edmunds St. John**

I cannot recall exactly what the octane level was on the 1997 Viognier, but it was high enough that my expectations were pretty low when this wine was first poured. How wrong could I be? This wine is plenty ripe, but it is first and foremost an Edmunds St. John wine and that means that it is balanced beautifully. The ripe and mature nose offers up a fine mélange of papaya, salty soil tones, orange peel and loads of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and still impressively fresh for a nearly twenty year-old bottle of viognier, with a good core, still solid framing acidity and impressive length and grip on the focused finish. This is not as complex as some of Steve’s other white wine bottlings that I have enjoyed over the years, but with even most Condrieu these days collapsing after four or five years in the bottle, to drink a nineteen year-old California viognier from a warm vintage with this kind of staying power is a great pleasure, not to mention surprise! And this still has some years of good drinking still ahead of it! 2016-2023+. **90.**

### ***Châteauneuf du Pape-Styled Blends***

*In addition to the bottlings wearing the labels of “Les Côtes Sauvages” and “Rocks and Gravel”, Steve Edmunds also fashioned a couple of other cuvées over the years that were loosely based on the traditions of Châteauneuf. These included his “Los Robles Viejos” (usually a blend of fifty percent mourvèdre and the other half a mix of grenache, syrah and counoise) sourced from the Rozet Vineyard in Paso Robles. The Rozet Vineyard is a very interesting terroir, as this bowl-shaped vineyard, surrounded by neighboring hills, is very, very hot in the midday sun, but the cooling effects blow in off the Pacific Ocean every afternoon, dropping temperatures*

*dramatically and allowing the diurnal swings that allow the grapes to maintain freshness and acidity in the finished wine. The Los Robles Viejos name was used for this Rozet Vineyard bottling from 2000 through 2002, after which the name was changed to “Shell and Bone”. Another of Steve’s southern Rhône inspired blends was his Red Neck 101, which is a fifty-fifty blend of grenache and syrah from the Eagle Point Ranch in Mendocino County. Les Côtes Sauvages had been made at Edmunds St. John since the very first year of the winery’s existence in 1985. It’s final vintage under this name was the 1996, after which the Les Côtes Sauvages flag was rolled up and given an early retirement. The 1997 vintage saw the ushering in of the blend under the new name of “Rocks and Gravel”, which Steve has used for this bottling up through the present day.*

### **2013 Rocks And Gravel- Edmunds St. John (Dry Creek Valley)**

The utterly stunning 2013 Rocks and Gravel is composed of a blend of fifty percent grenache and twenty-five percent each of syrah and mourvèdre. The wine is a cool 13.1 percent octane, with the grenache and syrah having been picked on September 2<sup>nd</sup> of this year and the mourvèdre coming in a bit more than two weeks later. The wine was fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in combination of cement and stainless steel. The bouquet is young, but already flat out beautiful, offering up scents of fresh raspberries, pepper, coffee, a superb base of soil tones, green olive and *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and laser-like, with tangy acids, great focus and grip, ripe, seamless tannins and stunning length on the poised and perfectly balanced finish. Great juice in the making, but give this bottle some time in the cellar to blossom. 2023-2060. **94+**.

### **2005 Redneck 101- Edmunds St. John (Mendocino)**

The 2005 Redneck 101 is a fifty-fifty blend of grenache and syrah sourced from the Eagle Point Ranch in Ukiah Valley. The wine is quite ripe by Steve Edmunds’ standards, coming in at 14.6 percent on the label and offering up a blend of raspberries, coffee, *garrigue*, a touch of soil and a bit of olive in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, long and nicely balanced for its fairly high octane, with a good core and focus, melting tannins and a bit of backend heat that keeps the score down a bit. This is a good, solid bottle, but by the high standards of Edmunds St. John, it is not all that interesting. 2016-2030. **89**.

### **2001 Rocks And Gravel- Edmunds St. John (Dry Creek Valley)**

The 2001 Rocks And Gravel bottling from Edmunds St. John is utterly superb, but is still a few years away from reaching its zenith of peak drinkability. The bouquet is deep, complex and shows great fidelity in style to the greatest reds of the southern Rhône in its mélange of raspberries, cherries, pepper, superb minerality, a touch of green olive and a topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and superbly well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, impressive soil signature and lovely length and grip on the still moderately tannic finish. This is an outstanding bottle, but give it another five years in the cellar to allow the tannins to fully fall away and the wine to reach its apogee. 2021-2050. **93**.

### **2001 Los Robles Viejos Red- Edmunds St. John (Paso Robles)**

This particular bottle of the 2001 Los Robles Viejos was showing a bit of brett on the nose and palate when we tasted it, but good underlying material as well. I should note that the last time I tasted this wine, five years ago, I did not notice any brett on the wine and really loved it, so perhaps something was off with this bottle? This is pretty ripe by Steve Edmunds standards, coming in at 14.2 percent octane, and offers up a complex nose of cherries, hung game, bonfire, *garrigue*, lovely soil tones and a bit of leather from the brett. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied and still quite youthful in personality at age fifteen, with a fine core, suave tannins and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced, albeit still slightly primary finish. This will continue to cruise along for many years and I might be inclined to keep it tucked away in the cellar for another four or five, just to let the tannins more fully fall away and more of the secondary layers of complexity emerge. If one is more tolerant of brett, add four to five points to my score, as there are a lot of good things going on here. 2020-2045+. **89.**

**2000 Los Robles Viejos Red- Edmunds St. John (Paso Robles)**

The 2000 vintage of Los Robles Viejos from Edmunds St. John is also still a fairly youthful wine, and this bottle showed a bit of reduction when we first opened it and it really needed a bit of time in decanter to blossom. Once it opened up, it showed very well indeed, wafting from the glass in a complex and nicely red fruity nose of baked cherries and raspberries, coffee, pepper, hung game, fine soil tones and a spicy topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and very well-balanced, with a fine core, blossoming complexity and impressive length and grip on the moderately tannic finish. This too could use a few more years in the cellar to fully soften up, but it does not show the same touch of brett as the 2001 version and really is a tasty bottle. 2020-2050. **91+.**



*Steve Edmunds in the afterglow of one of the greatest vertical tastings I have ever had the pleasure to share.*

**1993 Les Côtes Sauvages- Edmunds St. John**

The 1993 vintage of Les Côtes Sauvages is outstanding and is drinking at its apogee today. This carries the classic ripeness level of Châteauneuf du Pape back in its heyday of the 1980s, coming in at 13.5 percent and being comprised of a blend of fifty-one percent grenache,



thirty percent mourvèdre, fourteen percent syrah and five percent carignan. Interestingly, despite this vintage of Les Côtes Sauvages having more grenache in its blend, the wine is more black fruity than the 1989, wafting from the glass in a blend of baked black cherries, pepper, roasted meats, coffee, excellent soil tones, *garrigue* and a nice peppery topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still sports a bit of backend tannin, with an excellent core, impeccable balance and a long, complex and moderately tannic finish. This wine is drinking very well today, but I get the gut feeling that it is still climbing and will be an even better drink with another five years in the cellar! 2016-2040+. **93+**.

#### **1989 Les Côtes Sauvages- Edmunds St. John**

The 1989 Les Côtes Sauvages has aged beautifully, as its 13.1 percent alcohol level has given the wine the balance to evolve very gracefully in bottle and at age twenty-seven, the wine is at its zenith. The *cépages* for this vintage of Les Côtes Sauvages was fifty-three percent mourvèdre, twenty-four percent grenache, seventeen percent syrah and sixty percent carignan. The wine is drinking beautifully today, offering up a complex and mature bouquet of baked raspberries, green olive, hung game, pepper and *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still impressively tangy and vibrant, with a fine core, excellent complexity and grip and a long, suave and perfectly balanced finish. This still has years of life in it, but it is a beautiful time to be drinking the wine. 2016-2030+. **93**.

#### ***Zinfandel***

*Steve Edmunds produced his last vintage of zinfandel in 2001, but for many years, this was one of the staples in the Edmunds St. John lineup and consistently one of the most interesting bottlings of zinfandel produced in California. I always loved these wines back in my merchant days and drank them regularly, but never kept any around in the cellar and it is too bad that I did not do so, as these two oldies were drinking very well indeed. I should note that I was the only one at the table on this day to like the 1994 Zinfandel from Story Vineyard every bit as much as the 1990 Brandlin Ranch version, as Steve and the others thought it was already starting to slide down the far side of its plateau. Perhaps I benefited from working through the wines a bit more slowly, as my notes are always long and I invariably lag behind other tasters around the table. By the time I got to the '94, the wine had fleshed out nicely and was drinking with lovely verve and complexity. Zinfandel was one of the earliest wines in the Edmunds St. John portfolio, having first been produced in the winery's second vintage of 1986 and being part of the range of wines consistently up through the mid-1990s. But, the source for grapes often had to change, as the grape grew in popularity to fuel the over the top style that caught the imaginations of some, so that Steve was often outbid for grape sources of this variety that he had worked with in the past. His first few vintages came from the Brandlin Ranch on Mount Veeder, which had been planted back in the 1940s and was probably his favorite vineyard source for Zinfandel.*

#### **1994 Zinfandel "Story Vineyard"- Edmunds St. John (Shenandoah Valley)**

The 1994 Story Vineyard Zinfandel from Steve Edmunds is a lovely wine that has mellowed beautifully with bottle age and now offers up lovely complexity and a velvety palate impression. This wine is 13.7 percent alcohol, which is pretty tame by the zinfandel standards of the mid-1990s and offers up a complex bouquet of red and black raspberries, cocoa, lovely spice tones, a nice dollop of soil, woodsmoke and a touch of nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, suave and *à point*, with a good core, melted tannins and lovely

balance and bounce on the elegant finish. Very tasty and a gentler style of zinfandel that I really like. 2016-2025. **92.**

### **1990 Zinfandel “Brandlin Ranch”- Edmunds St. John (Mount Veeder)**

Steve made zinfandel from Brandlin Ranch’s old vine plantations for five years from 1986 through 1990, and then did not have access to the grapes again until the 1996 vintage, which was his last bottling of zin from this vineyard. The 1990 was labeled at 12.8 percent alcohol, but Steve told that they had made a mistake with the analysis back in the day and the wine was probably about a point higher in octane in reality. The wine is drinking beautifully at age twenty-six, offering up a brambly nose of ripe black fruit, pepper, *garrigue*, a fine base of soil and roasted game. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and complex, with a fine core, still a bit of backend tannin and plenty of the varietal’s acidity to continue to carry the wine far into the future. This is classic old vine zinfandel that is aging quite nicely and has years and years of life still ahead of it. 2016-2035+. **92.**

### **Syrah**

*Today, Edmunds St. John is synonymous with the very finest wines that can be fashioned from the syrah grape in California, but it was not until the sixth vintage at the winery that Steve Edmunds made his first single vineyard syrah bottling, as prior to this time, the grapes had always been used here solely as one of the building blocks for the Les Côtes Sauvages cuvée or were bottled as a syrah “tout court”. The very first bottling of syrah labeled as hailing from a single vineyard was in the 1990 vintage from the Durrell Vineyard in Sonoma, which had already been going into the Les Côtes Sauvages from the second vintage of that bottling in 1986. As Steve Edmunds notes, “the ’90 was the first one for which we got permission to put the Durell name on the label,” but “the ’88 and ’89 were also all Durell, but not labeled as such.” Prior to this, there had been a bit of Edmunds St. John syrah bottled without vineyard designations in 1986 (which included seventeen percent cabernet franc, of all things, in the blend, from a vineyard in Geyserville) and 1987 (a blend of Durrell and McDowell Valley fruit). The single vineyard Durrell Vineyard bottling of syrah was done each year at Edmunds St. John from 1990 up through 1997, when Ed Durrell told Steve he was going to sell the vineyard, rather than incur the costs of replanting because of phylloxera. In addition, Steve has produced superb Syrahs from other vineyards such as Parmalee-Hill Vineyard in Sonoma (first vintage 1997), Fenaughty Vineyard in El Dorado (first vintage also 1997- this was routinely bottled in subsequent vintages as Wylie-Fenaughty, with the production added from the Wylie Vineyard to the cuvée), Bassetti Vineyard in San Luis Obispo (first vintage 2001) and Syrah “Cuvée Fairbairn” in 2008. The Bassetti Vineyard in particular is pretty remarkable for its very cool situation, as it is only a few miles inland from the Pacific Ocean and is one of the coolest vineyard sites in all of California and the syrah here gets the benefit of extended hang time every year.*

*While most of the Edmunds St. John bottlings of syrah from 1990 forwards have been single vineyard wines, there have also been a few blended syrah cuvées produced over the years to augment the single vineyard wines, such as a syrah that Steve labeled “Grand Heritage” (a blend of Durrell Vineyard fruit and Fenaughty Vineyard syrah), which was done in the 1992 and 1993 vintages. As Steve explains, “we did ’92 and ’93 Grand Heritage wines,” as in these “two years the Fenaughty fruit was exceptionally strong, and could meet the intensity of the Durell in a successful kind of synergy.” He noted that at this time, “in other vintages we’d used Fenaughty syrah in the blend of Les Cotes Sauvages.” Another very limited bottling of syrah from a few*



vintages was his “Higher Ground” syrah that was produced in miniscule quantities in both 1996 and 1997. As Steve recalls about this ill-fated project, “Higher Ground was a vineyard that I tried to develop” with a gentleman “who really wanted to invest in the winery, and I suggested that he buy some land and we would go in as partners to develop a vineyard on it.” From the outset, this project ran into logistical difficulties, as Steve notes that “the problem was that the land he bought was up above Fair Play, at about 3,400 feet elevation, and almost a three hour drive from Berkeley,” so I had to hire “a local (Fair Play) vineyard guy to manage it, and he made some egregious mistakes.” Eventually Steve “hired someone else, and she screwed it up, too- after the third vineyard manager, I gave up” on the project.

While Steve Edmunds is probably best-known for his Châteauneuf-styled bottlings of Les Côtes Sauvages and Rocks and Gravel, his greatest wines in my experience may very well be his beautiful cuvées of syrah, and this was the primary focus of our superb vertical tasting in Berkeley at the end of August. During our tasting, Steve noted that “in the first few years, I tended to de-stem my syrah completely, even when we were using some whole clusters for other grapes, but as the years went by, I started to include some stems in the syrah bottlings as well.” When I asked him via email to elaborate a bit on this evolution of his syrah philosophy (as my notes were skimpy about this and my memory perhaps a bit hazy after thirty-plus great wines that afternoon), he noted that “I didn’t de-stem in ’85 at all, because I had no de-stemmer,” but “in ’86- the first year of Durell fruit for us- I de-stemmed it all, and did that until ’91.” From that point he began to retain a bit of the stems for his syrah fermentations for several vintages, recalling that in “1991, 1992, and 1993 I did some whole-cluster- a small percentage-maybe fifteen to twenty percent- to see what I thought, and then de-stemmed (my syrah) after that, except for the 2009 Wylie Vineyard bottling, which was entirely whole-clusters and which was a beast the last time I checked, but with lots of flavor.” As the notes below will attest, the various Edmunds St. John bottlings of syrah are long-distance runners that are built for many decades of life and improve dramatically with bottle age, just like the old world examples of Hermitage, Cornas and Côte-Rôtie that Steve Edmunds cut his teeth on back in his wine merchant days prior to opening the doors on Edmunds St. John in 1985.

### **2015 Syrah “North Canyon Road”- Edmunds St. John (Eldorado)**

The North Canyon Road bottling of syrah from Steve Edmunds is a blend of fruit from the Fenaughty Vineyard and Barsotti Ranch, both located in the Sierra Foothills in Eldorado County. The 2015 bottling is a touch riper than the Barsotti Ranch 2014 below, but offers up a lovely aromatic blend of black plums, cassis, venison, *garrigue*, a bit of chocolate and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely tangy, with a plump core, a fine promise of complexity down the road and a long, well-balanced and ripely tannic finish. This is still a puppy, but will be a fine, fine glass of syrah in the fullness of time. 2027-2060. 93.

### **2014 Syrah “Barsotti Ranch”- Edmunds St. John (Eldorado)**

The 2014 Barsotti Ranch Syrah from Edmunds St. John is one of the current releases of this varietal from the winery. This vineyard is also the site of the gamay that the winery produces, as the weathered granite soils in this three thousand foot elevation vineyard are perfect for both gamay and syrah. The 2014 Barsotti syrah is superb, offering up a distinctly low octane bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, raw cocoa, stony soil tones and a nice topnote of smoked meats. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine

core, impressive focus and grip, very fine-grained tannins and excellent balance on the very long and soil-driven finish. This is young, but it is going to be stunning syrah when it is ready to drink! 2027-2070. **94+**.

**2005 Syrah “Bassetti Vineyard”- Edmunds St. John (San Luis Obispo County)**

The 2005 Bassetti Vineyard bottling of syrah was very tight and bound up in its structural elements when I last tasted it six years ago, and I was very happy to see the wine in our vertical tasting this past August in Berkeley. The ensuing years have been very kind to this superb bottle and today, it is starting to stir a bit and all of its inherent beauty is now very evident and easy to appreciate. The wine could still do with another six to ten years in the cellar to really reach its zenith, but today it is very easy to see just how great this wine is going to be when it is fully mature. The bouquet is still youthful, but now detailed and classic in its combination of black raspberries, pepper, superb minerality, roasted venison, cocoa and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe, seamless tannins, good acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long and nascently complex finish. All this superb bottle needs is a bit more time in the cellar. 2023-2065. **94**.

**2001 Syrah “Wylie-Fenaughty”- Edmunds St. John (Eldorado County)**

The 2001 vintage of Wylie-Fenaughty Syrah from Steve Edmunds is just a touch riper than the beautiful 2000 version (14.4 percent versus 14.1), but the wine seems every bit as well-balanced and seamless and offers up superb potential. The first class bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of cassis, smoked meats, dark soil tones, a bit of *garrigue*, pepper and raw cocoa. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and buxom in personality, with lovely mid-palate concentration, ripe tannins, very good acidity for its octane and a very long, poised and perfectly balanced finish. Fine juice in the making. 2021-2055. **93**.

**2001 Syrah “Bassetti Vineyard”- Edmunds St. John (San Luis Obispo County)**

This particular bottle of the '01 Bassetti Vineyard Syrah seemed to be showing a touch of brett, but I noted that when I last tasted this wine six years ago, I did not notice this element at all in the wine, so perhaps it was just a touch reductive instead? Underneath this touch of barnyard is a dynamite bottle in the making, offering up scents of dark berries, pepper, roasted venison, a fine base of soil and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and just starting to blossom convincingly, with suave tannins, fine focus and grip and a very long, still slightly youthful finish. I would love to pop a bottle of this wine, pour it off into decanter for an hour and then follow it over the course of the meal, to see if the wine blossoms more completely. It is still a few years away from its plateau of peak drinkability, and I see no reason not to assume that the pristine bottle I drank back in 2010 is not the more representative bottle. 2021-2055. **91-92+**.

**2000 Syrah “Wylie-Fenaughty”- Edmunds St. John (Eldorado County)**

The 2000 vintage of Wylie-Fenaughty Syrah is just starting to stir structurally and is going to be a dynamite bottle with a bit more bottle age. The bouquet is pure, precise and starting to show some lovely secondary elements in its blend of sweet dark berries, cocoa, pepper, smoked meats, a lovely base of soil, black olive and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, tangy acids, ripe tannins and beautiful balance on the long, focused finish. All this beauty needs is a bit more time in the cellar! 2021-2055. **93+**.



### **1997 Syrah “Higher Ground”- Edmunds St. John**

The 1997 Higher Ground bottling of Syrah was produced by Steve Edmunds only in a couple of vintages, in tiny quantities. The '97 vintage produced all of twenty-seven cases of wine! The wine is a ripe example of syrah, but a bit less heady than its counterpart from the '96 vintage and offers up a fine nose of cassis, grilled meat, pepper, woodsmoke, a nice touch of dried eucalyptus and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and still fairly chewy, with very good focus and grip, a plump core and still a certain firmness to the edge of the ripe tannins that demands a bit more bottle age before really starting to drink with generosity. This is a very good bottle, but give it at least three or four more years in the cellar to more completely blossom. 2020-2040. **92.**

### **1997 Syrah “Parmalee Hill Vineyard”- Edmunds St. John (Sonoma)**

This is the first vintage that Steve Edmunds ever produced of syrah from the Parmalee Hill Vineyard, which was carved out of an unplanted section of the Durrell Ranch by Ed Durrell’s long-time vineyard manager, Steve Hill. The wine is a classic on both the nose and palate, offering up a pure and sophisticated bouquet of black raspberries, sweet cassis, a touch of dried eucalyptus, beautiful soil tones, smoke and a gentle topnote of anise. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and impressively tangy as well, with a superb core, ripe tannins and exceptional length and grip on the perfectly balanced and complex finish. A beautiful bottle

of syrah that could still do with a few more years in the cellar to completely blossom. 2020-2050+. **94.**

**1996 Syrah “Durrell Vineyard” Edmunds St. John (Sonoma)**

The 1996 vintage of Durrell syrah from Steve Edmunds is one of his riper examples, with the label listing this sumptuous wine at 14.2 percent octane, but the wine seeming just a bit riper than that to my palate. The bouquet is plush and fairly fruit-driven for this cuvée, offering up scents of sappy cassis, chocolate, a touch of eucalyptus and plenty of upper register smokiness. The Durrell bottling usually has a lovely base of soil tones, but the 1996 (at least at the present time) is not showing a whole lot of this in its aromatic profile. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plump on the attack, with a good core, a slightly easy-going structure and a long, gently tannic finish. I am sure that this wine is very much emblematic of its vintage and is very tasty, but when one gets spoiled by so much *terroir* in less ripe vintages from Durrell, it is hard to accustom one’s palate to this more fruit-oriented style of the ’96. I would probably have enjoyed it more served on its own, but flanked by so many soil-driven vintages of Durrell at our vertical tasting, the style of the ’96 really stood out from the pack. 2016-2025+. **90.**

**1996 Syrah “Higher Ground”- Edmunds St. John**

There were only six cases (that is right- seventy-two bottles) produced of the 1996 Higher Ground Syrah from Edmunds St. John! The wine is ripe, like the ’96 Durrell bottling, but also shows a bit more structure today than that wine. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of black raspberries, cassis, roasted venison, pepper, chocolate, a nice touch of soil and a bit of coffee grounds from its riper style. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately complex, with a good core and a long, chewy and slightly heady finish. I did not write down the octane level for this bottling, but I suspect it is probably a touch higher than the ’96 Durrell’s 14.2 percent alcohol. Not a bad wine by any means, but it does show a touch of its alcohol on the finish. 2016-2035. **91.**

**1994 Syrah “Durrell Vineyard” Edmunds St. John (Sonoma)**

The 1994 vintage of Edmunds St. John syrah from the Durrell Vineyard is absolutely stellar and one of my favorite vintages of this cuvée. The wine wafts from the glass in a superb, *à point* bouquet of cassis, pepper, grilled meats, a really stylish note of eucalyptus, a beautiful soil signature and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and utterly seamless in balance, with a sappy core, fine transparency, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, pure and meltingly tannic finish. This is a bit lower in octane than several of the other syrah bottlings from this epoch, coming in at 13.6 percent, and this really seems to have been the sweet spot in terms of ripeness for the syrah from Durrell. Great, great juice and probably one of the great bottlings of syrah ever produced in the history of California. 2016-2045+. **95.**

**1993 Syrah “Grand Heritage”- Edmunds St. John (California)**

Steve Edmunds came up with the name of “Grand Heritage” as a play on words for Penfolds great Grange Hermitage bottling. The 1993 was comprised of a blend of fifty-eight percent Durrell Vineyard fruit and forty-two percent Fenaughty Vineyard fruit from Eldorado, which would go on to become one of Steve’s most important syrah vineyard sources in the years to come. The 1993 Grand Heritage is now into its plateau, offering up a fine bouquet of cassis, dark berries, pepper, new leather, a good signature of soil and a topnote of browned spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and nicely tangy, with a fine core, moderate, well-integrated tannins and impressive length and grip on the complex and gently chewy finish. This will probably not last quite as long as the ’93 Durrell Syrah, but it still has a good quarter century of superb drinking ahead of it. 2016-2040. **93.**



### **1993 Syrah “Durell Vineyard”- Edmunds St. John (Sonoma)**

The 1993 vintage of Durell Syrah from Steve Edmunds is outstanding, coming in at 13.6 percent octane and now into its apogee of peak drinkability. The bouquet is precise and complex, soaring from the glass in a blaze of black raspberries, sweet cassis, pepper, grilled venison, cocoa, woodsmoke and a marvelous base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now right into its apogee, with a rock solid core, impeccable focus and grip, moderate tannins and a very, very long, refined and complex finish. This superb syrah has years and years of life still ahead of it, but it is now drinking with great style and this is a marvelous time to be opening bottles. 2016-2050. **95.**

### **1992 Syrah “Grand Heritage”- Edmunds St. John (California)**

The 1992 Grand Heritage Syrah from Edmunds St. John is a bit riper than the 1993 version, tipping the scales at 14.2 percent, but carries its octane with style and grace. The bouquet is complex and expressive, offering up scents of cassis, black raspberries, cocoa, pepper, grilled meats and a good base of soil tones. Interestingly, despite it being a tad riper than the '93, it also seems more vibrant on the nose. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush with ripe fruit on the attack, with a superb core, fine focus and grip and still a touch of backend tannin perking up the long and complex finish. This is really very, very good. 2016-2030+. **92+.**

### **1992 Syrah “Durrell Vineyard”- Edmunds St. John (Sonoma)**

The 1992 Durrell Vineyard Syrah from Steve Edmunds is a very good bottle of wine that is now into its apogee of maturity, but it is crafted in the slightly riper style of this epoch, which has given the remaining tannins just a touch of grittiness to their texture and keeps the score down a tad. The wine is 13.8 percent octane on the label and delivers a fine aromatic constellation of cassis, chocolate, roasted meats, a touch of pepper, lovely soil tones and a topnote of *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and classy, with that certain inherent Durrell Vineyard sense of elegance on display in the lovely fruit. The wine has a fine core, good focus and balance, but the tannins seem a bit less refined than is customary in most vintages of Steve’s Durrell bottling. This is a very, very good bottle with plenty of life still ahead of it, but other vintages of Durrell Syrah here have found even higher ground. 2016-2035. **92.**

### **1991 Syrah “Durrell Vineyard”- Edmunds St. John (Sonoma)**

The 1991 was only the second Durrell Vineyard bottling of syrah to be labeled as such and the wine is absolutely stellar today! The wine is now at its apogee at age twenty-five and probably has another quarter century of outstanding drinking ahead of it. The bouquet is deep, pure and classy, offering up a vibrant blend of cassis, pepper, roasted meats, a touch of bonfire, a fine base of soil, bitter chocolate and a nice touch of *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and perfectly balanced, with a fine core, good acids and impressive length and grip on the poised and still modestly tannic finish. This is a great bottle of mature syrah. 2016-2040. **94.**

### **1987 Syrah- Edmunds St. John (California)**

The 1987 Syrah from Steve Edmunds is now fully mature and probably the only bottling in this vertical that was getting towards the far side of its plateau. This was eighty-five percent fruit from Durrell Vineyard in Sonoma and fifteen percent from McDowell Valley up in Mendocino, with everything destemmed. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex and tertiary blend of cassis, a bit of plum, dried eucalyptus, pepper, new leather and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still shows a touch of backend tannin, with fine complexity and balance and a long, gently chewy and fully mature finish. This is still very tasty to drink, but my guess is that the fruit will start to fade a bit in the coming years and it is probably a good time to be drinking it up. For only the third vintage at Edmunds St. John, this has aged very nicely and was a harbinger of the great things to come with syrah here! 2016-2023+? **90.**



## THE 2015 VINTAGE IN THE LOIRE VALLEY



The 2015 vintage in the Loire Valley is a very good, sometimes outstanding, but also somewhat inconsistent year, as not every region along the meandering banks of this beautiful river fared equally well in the hot summer of 2015. The spring was early and warm, but there were some issues with flowering reducing yields right out of the blocks- particularly in Pouilly-Fumé and Sancerre. In general, the spring augured well for the year (other than the difficulties during *floraison* in isolated sectors) and set the table for what could have been a great vintage across the board. The following months of mid-summer were hot and dry, as was the case throughout France in 2015, and as the summer went along, issues of hydric stress and blocked maturation plagued certain vineyards throughout the Loire and this is where the inconsistency of the vintage can be found. Younger vines and stonier soils had the most difficult time during the drought of mid-summer, but other than these isolated pockets of blocked maturation, most regions were able to ripen up their bunches completely by the time autumn started to arrive. Harvesting began very early in the eastern end of the Loire, with the sauvignon blanc quite precocious in Sancerre and (particularly) Pouilly-Fumé, with the resulting wines generous, pure and nicely zesty, but without the cut and grip of a cooler and more drawn out growing season.



Moving westward, there was good and bad news in the Touraine, as the chenin blanc grape did very well in this year and its lovely ripeness was augmented by plenty of botrytis arriving in the *fin de saison*, making this the most heavily-glazed year here since 1997. With noble rot defining the vintage in Vouvray and Montlouis, it is not surprising that the real strength of the 2015 vintage is with the Demi-Sec wines on up to Moelleux and other dessert level bottlings in this sector, with the wines showing some stylistic similarities to the young 1990s at these early stages of evolution. Domaine Huët in particular has made some monumental bottlings at the upper levels of sweetness in 2015. There are also some very good Sec bottlings to be found in Vouvray in this vintage, but quantities will be smaller at this level, as the strength of the vintage was with the sweeter wines. I had heard reports prior to starting to taste wines from 2015 that some Vouvray Sec bottlings were going to be very high in alcohol this year, but I did not find this to be the case with the examples that I tasted. Red grapes in the Touraine did not fare quite as well as the chenin blanc in Vouvray and Montlouis, as the arrival of botrytis was not the same welcome event and the noble rot was also accompanied by less noble grey rot, with the gamay grape in particular struggling with this scourge in the lead up to picking. The examples of Touraine Sauvignon Blanc that I have tried from 2015 are nice wines, with plump and generous fruit tones, nice aromatics, but many seemed a bit soft and low in acid from the heat of the summer.

In the major red wine core regions of the central Loire, Bourgueil, Chinon and Saumur-Champigny, the cabernet franc grapes ripened beautifully, but fairly briskly in the heat of 2015, so that the wines do not have the same backend vivacity generally found in the 2014 vintage here. Consequently, the structures of these fine reds are a bit more plush in style and the wines likely to delight sooner, but perhaps not last as long in bottle as the reds from the previous and quite strong vintage of 2014. That said, there are a lot of 2015s from this sector that are flat out delicious to drink out of the blocks, with slightly lower acidity, but plush cores, fine-grained and often pretty laid back tannins, and lovely purity and succulence. For those who prefer to age their red Loire wines over the long haul from these appellations, 2015 may not be quite as favorable as 2014, but the 2015 wines in general have balance, lovely fruit tones and plenty of personality and should still have no difficulties cruising along at least a couple of decades in bottle. Along with Vouvray's and Montlouis' sweeter bottlings, the red wines of these three great appellations are probably the strongest group of wines to be found in all of the Loire in 2015. In the Anjou, the botrytis is reported to be generous and energizing and it looks to be a classic year for the sweet bottlings from this section of the Loire, though I have not yet tasted a very wide selection from this part of the Loire and am looking forward to trying more in the months to come.

In Muscadet, 2015 is not quite as strong as in other sectors of the Loire Valley. Hopes of a great vintage in 2015 were dashed when substantial rains fell in September, forcing *vignerons'* hands and leading to wines with good purity and complexity, but without the customary backend cut and grip that would have been evident without the rains leading into harvest. However, prior to the untimely rainy weather, Muscadet was on pace for a lovely vintage, so *vignerons* had already attained pretty good ripeness prior to the clouds rolling in and the wines are still surprisingly good, given how much rain was dumped on the vineyards right before harvest. I should note that I have not yet seen some of my favorite 2015 Muscadets from estates such as Domaine de la Pépière and Domaine Luneau-Papin, and it may well be that these very talented *vignerons* have produced 2015s that are even a cut above some of the good examples I have

tasted from other producers. I plan to start working on a second round of coverage on the 2015 Loire Valley wines as soon as I am back from Burgundy at the end of November, as it was simply not possible to taste through all of my favorite producers' wines from this vintage this time around prior to my departure for Beaune.

### ***Sparkling Wines***

#### **Touraine Brut Rosé “Methode Traditionelle” - Charles Bove**

The Touraine Brut Rosé from Charles Bove is made of a blend of eighty percent cabernet franc and twenty percent gamay. The bouquet is bright and classy, offering up scents of cherries, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones, dried rose petals and a touch of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and shows fine mid-palate depth, with the bracing acids of youth, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is impressively light on its feet and complex and will be very good in due course, but it is still a young wine and could do with another year's worth of bottle age. Good juice. 2017-2025+. **88+**.

#### **Éclipse “Methode Traditionelle” Brut NV – Sébastien Branger**

Sébastien Branger is a fine grower in Muscadet and he makes a small quantity of this lovely sparkling wine, which is made entirely from old vine Melon de Bourgogne grapes. The wine is aged one year *sur latte* and offers up a bright and complex nose of apple, lemon, bread dough and stony minerality. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a good core, fine backend mineral drive, frothy bubbles, snappy acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is very well-made and tasty. 2016-2030. **88**.

#### **Vouvray “Methode Traditionelle” Brut NV – Bernard Fouquet**

The new release of sparkling Vouvray from Bernard Fouquet is really quite lovely, offering up a vibrant and classy bouquet of quince, lemon, chalky minerality and a touch of bread dough. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with slightly coarse *mousse*, but fine focus and grip on the long, nascently complex finish. This is already very easy to drink, but will also age nicely over the next decade and probably will be even better with some bottle age. 2016-2025+. **89**.

#### **2013 Montlouis Pétillant Brut Millésime- Le Rocher des Violettes (Xavier Weisskopf)**

The 2013 Montlouis Pétillant from Xavier Weisskopf is a lovely example, offering up a fine nose of lemon, a touch of quince, chalky minerality, bread dough and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, brisk and nicely balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, fine focus and a long, youthful finish. This is eminently drinkable today, but will be even better with a bit of bottle age. Very well done. 2016-2025+. **90**.

#### **2012 Vouvray Pétillant Brut Millésime- Domaine Huët**

The 2012 Vouvray Pétillant from Domaine Huët is excellent on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, lemon, chalky minerality, bread dough, dried flowers and a gentle saline note in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and youthfully zesty, with a lovely core, frothy *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a very long, nascently complex finish. This is very tasty today, but this cuvée always ages gracefully and it is really early days for this lovely wine. Its apogee is probably ten years down the road! 2016-2035+. **91+**.

#### **2009 Vouvray Pétillant “Réserve” Brut Millésime- Domaine Huët**

Domaine Huët's 2009 Vouvray Pétillant “Réserve” is far more like Champagne in personality than the 2012 version, due to its extended time aging *sur latte*. The bouquet is deep,

complex and really refined, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of apple, a touch of quince, warm bread, chalky soil tones and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a rock solid core, crisp acids, fine focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and impressive length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This has only recently been disgorged and it is every bit as youthful as the 2012 regular bottling. It is built to age and should prove to be very long-lived. Quite approachable today, but I might be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for at least a few more years and really let its superb structure relax a bit more, as it may ultimately be as fine as the famous 1964! 2019-2045. **93.**

### ***Muscadet***

#### **2015 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “le Fils des Gras Moutons”- Claude Branger**

Claude Branger and his son, Sébastien, have nice holdings in the fine vineyard of Gras Moutons, which many Muscadet fans will know from the bottling produced by Domaine de la Pépière from this vineyard. The soil here is Gneiss, and the Brangers make two different bottlings from their holdings, with this wine made from their younger plantings, which are thirty-six years of age (the old vines are reserved for their bottling labeled simply as Gras Moutons). The family hand harvests all of their parcels and was certified organic in 2016. The 2015 “le Fils des Gras Moutons” offers up a bright bouquet of lime, bread fruit, straw, lovely minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nicely balanced, with a good core, fine complexity and impressive grip on the backend that belies the rainy harvesting weather of 2015. This is really a good basic bottling! 2016-2023. **89.**

#### **2015 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “les Dabinières”- Bonnet-Huteau**

The les Dabinières single vineyard bottling from Bonnet-Huteau hails from soils that are mica-schist and gneiss, with just a touch of clay to add a bit of *gravitas* in the mid-palate. The 2015 les Dabinières is lovely, wafting from the glass in a complex constellation of lemon, a touch of pear, straw, ocean breeze, beautiful minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and wide open in personality, with a lovely core, solid framing acids, lovely focus and a long, complex and classy finish. This does not have the backend cut of a vintage with fine *fin de saison* weather, but there is still plenty of vivacity on the backend and the wine should age fairly well. 2016-2025. **90.**

#### **2015 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “les Laures”- Bonnet-Huteau**

The 2015 Muscadet “les Laures” from Bonnet-Huteau shows its granitic backbone of its soils in its fine bouquet of lime, a touch of breadfruit, stony minerality, a touch of citrus blossom and a gently briny topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, fairly crisp and complex, with a lovely core, a fine base of minerality and good length and focus on the wide open and fairly easy-going finish. This is a touch more reserved in personality out of the blocks than the les Dabinières, but it too is going to be at its best over the next several years, as there is just not enough backend grip to carry it long-term. Good juice. 2016-2025. **90+.**

#### **2015 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “Classic”- Domaine de l’Écu**

The 2015 “Classic” from Domaine de l’Écu is a lovely bottle of Muscadet, with the rain at harvest showing just a touch of influence on the backend, but the wine still showing its customary depth, breed and complexity. The bouquet is a fine blend of tart orange, wet stone minerality, sea salts and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and complex, with a good solid core, nice backend mineral drive and a nice dollop of CO2 on the backend (from its lees aging) that adds lift and bounce on the well-balanced and classy finish. This does not have

quite its customary grip and will probably not be as long-lived as most vintages, but it is flat out delicious out of the blocks. 2016-2020. **89.**

**2015 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine- Domaine Saint Martin**

The 2015 Muscadet from Domaine Saint Martin spent eight months on its fine lees prior to bottling. The wine offers up a good, classic bouquet of lime peel, bread fruit, sea salts, straw and wet stones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and nicely complex, with sound framing acids and good length on the focused finish. There is not quite the same cut and grip one would have found here without the pre-harvest rains, but this is well made in the context of the vintage. 2016-2018. **87.**

**2014 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “Terroirs les Gras Moutons”- Claude Branger**

The Terroirs les Gras Moutons from Claude Branger hails from vines in excess of fifty years of age and is the top bottling from the domaine. The bouquet on the 2014 version is excellent, wafting from the glass in a classic blend of bread fruit, ocean breeze, dried flowers, a gentle touch of sweet nuttiness (from its lees contact) and a beautifully complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, crisp and complex, with fine mineral drive, a good core and a long, vibrant and briny finish. Good juice. 2016-2025. **92.**

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

**2012 Muscadet-sur-Lie-Sèvre-et-Maine “Goulaine”- Bonnet-Huteau**

The 2012 Goulaine bottling from Bonnet-Huteau is made from a parcel of vines that are in excess of forty years of age and are farmed organically. The wine is aged a minimum of eight months on its lees prior to bottling. The 2012 version is outstanding on both the nose and palate and has really reached a beautiful point in its evolution for drinking. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of bread fruit, lemon, gentle leesiness, dried flowers and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, crisp and quite complex, with a fine core, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This is a lovely bottle of Muscadet. 2016-2030. **93.**

**2010 Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine “Monnières- St. Fiacres”- Claude Branger**

The bottling of Muscadet “Monnières- St. Fiacres” from Claude Branger is produced from a gneiss *terroir* and the wine is aged a minimum of two years on its lees prior to bottling. The 2010 version is outstanding, offering up a bright and wide open bouquet of lemon, dried flowers, a simply gorgeous base of minerality, citrus blossoms, bee pollen and a touch of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, superb focus and grip and a very long, *à point* and energetic finish. At age six, this wine is at its apogee, but is beautifully balanced and should have no difficulty cruising along for another decade or more at this very high level. Impressive juice. 2016-2026+. **93.**

**2009 Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine- Domaine de la Pépière (Marc Ollivier)**

It had been five years since I last tasted the 2009 regular bottling from Marc Ollivier and the wine is drinking beautifully today. The bouquet is bright and still in its prime, wafting from the glass in a fine mélange of lemon, sea salts, dried flowers, wet granite and lime peel. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and nicely round on the attack, with a fine core, lovely stoniness, fine framing acids and excellent backend energy and grip on the long and focused finish. This is aging beautifully. 2016-2025. **92.**

### ***Anjou Blanc***

#### **2015 Anjou Blanc “Chauvigné”- Domaine Richou**

The 2015 Anjou Blanc “Chauvigné” from the Richou brothers, Didier and Damien, is the domaine’s dry chenin blanc bottling. The 2015 version is excellent, wafting from the glass in a youthfully complex nose of quince, tart orange, chalky soil tones, lanolin and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and rock solid at the core, with excellent acids, plenty of backend mineral drive and a long, zesty and youthful finish. This is eminently drinkable today, but there is the depth and balance here to age well and I would be inclined to tuck this away in the cellar for three or four years and really let it start hitting on all cylinders. Fine juice. 2018-2030+. **91+**.

#### **2013 Anjou Blanc “Litus”- Eric Morgat**

The 2013 Anjou Blanc “Litus” from Eric Morgat is labeled as a Sec on the back label this year and comes in at an even thirteen percent octane. The bouquet is pure, vibrant and still quite primary, jumping from the glass in a mix of peach, quince, a hint of fresh pineapple, lanolin, chalky soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and focused, with a more open personality than the youthful nose suggests, good framing acids and lovely focus and grip on the very long and complex finish. Eric Morgat is simply one of the finest winemakers in all of the Loire Valley and his 2013 Litus is delicious, despite this not being a great year in Anjou. 2016-2035. **92**.

### ***Savennières***

#### **2013 Savennières “Fidès”- Eric Morgat**

The 2013 vintage of Savennières “Fidès” of Eric Morgat is only the second to wear this label, as this bottling was previously known as “l’Enclos”. I should note that it is only listed as Fidès on the front label and the Savennières appellation is printed on the back label. The wine is a lovely example in a difficult vintage, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of quince, white peach, a lovely base of soil (this is primarily from schist soils), a touch of beeswax, spring flowers and just a whisper of lanolin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with just a touch of the dilution of the vintage evident in the core, but this is beautifully managed with balance of the other elements. The acids are bright and framing in nature, the wine is poised and nascently complex, with excellent length and grip. This is quite approachable out of the blocks and quite lovely to drink in its youth, but seems likely to also age long and gracefully as well. A fine 2013. 2016-2030. **92**.

### ***Anjou Rouge***

#### **2015 Anjou Rouge “les 4 Chemins”- Domaine Richou**

The single vineyard “les 4 Chemins” bottling from Domaine Richou is a blend of eighty percent cabernet franc and twenty percent cabernet sauvignon, grown on schist soils. The 2015 version is excellent, offering up a pure and ripe nose of blackberries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, espresso and a nice touch of charred wood in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and classy, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil signature, moderate, ripe tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and complex finish. In the ripe year of 2015, this comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and is precise and classy. It is very drinkable out of the blocks, but will also age long and gracefully. Fine juice and an excellent value! 2016-2030+. **91**.

### **2015 Anjou Rouge “les Châteliers”- Domaine Richou**

The 2015 les Châteliers vineyard at Domaine Richou is planted to Gamay, in similar schist and quartz soils as found in les 4 Chemins. The 2015 les Châteliers is fairly deep in color for this varietal, offering up a fine, smoky nose of black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of sweet herbs, just a dollop of nutskin and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is quite full for Gamay, with a bit of backend tannin, fine focus and balance and a long, well-balanced and gently chewy finish. This is quite concentrated for the varietal, but this is the nature of the 2015 vintage, and the wine is very well done in its style, with impressive backend persistence and bounce. 2016-2025. **90.**

### ***Saumur Blanc***

#### **2014 Saumur Blanc- Domaine des Hauts de Sanziers**

The 2014 Saumur Blanc from Domaine des Hauts de Sanziers is a good, solid bottle of chenin blanc, but without any pretensions of greatness. The bouquet offers up a workman-like blend of apple, dusty chenin soil tones, wet wool and quince. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, simple and tasty, with a plump core, sound acids and good length and grip on the chunky finish. This is solid everyday wine. 2016-2020+. **86.**

### ***Saumur-Champigny***

#### **2015 Saumur Rouge- Domaine des Hauts de Sanziers**

The 2015 Saumur Rouge from Domaine des Hauts de Sanziers is made entirely from cabernet franc, with the wine fermented and raised in stainless steel. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of sweet dark berries, tree bark, dark soil tones and a touch of currant leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and nicely balanced, with a solid core, a fair bit of youthful tannin and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This has very good stuffing, but will need a year or two in bottle to really start to drink with generosity. Good, honest juice. 2018-2025+. **88.**

### **2013 Saumur-Champigny “Eolithe”- Château de Fosse-Seche**

The 2013 Saumur-Champigny “Eolithe” from Château de Fosse-Seche is a fine follow-up to the very successful 2012 version, with one sniff of the wine in the glass taking me back to my formative days in the wine trade when a lot of young St. Émilion used to smell like this lovely wine! The bouquet is a lovely mix of pure cabernet franc fruit and iron soil tones, jumping from the glass in a complex and classy constellation of sweet dark berries, black cherries, a touch of menthol, cigar ash, fine, almost salty soil tones and a dollop of new leather. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and complex, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine balance and grip, a fair bit of backend tannin and a very long, refined and bouncy finish. There is not a lot of depth at the core here, but that is the vintage, and there is a load of personality and no shortage of length and grip on the backend! This is a classy middleweight that is eminently approachable today, but which will be even better with a bit of bottle age to allow the secondary layers of complexity to emerge. 2016-2030+. **91.**

### **2013 Saumur-Champigny “Tuffe”- Château Hureau (Philippe et Georges Vatan)**

The 2013 Saumur-Champigny “Tuffe” from Château Hureau is excellent, offering up impressive nascent complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy blend of sweet dark berries, espresso, a touch of tree bark, dark soil tones, cigar wrapper and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the

core, with lovely balance, moderate tannins and impressive length and grip on the youthfully complex finish. This is a lovely bottle of Saumur-Champigny. 2016-2030+. **91.**

**2012 Saumur-Champigny “la Grande Vignolle”- Domaine Filliatreau**

I first tasted the 2012 la Grande Vignolle bottling from Domaine Filliatreau two years ago and loved the wine, but worried about it being sealed with a plastic cork. Twenty-four months down the road, the wine is aging beautifully and it certainly seems that my initial fears about its closure were unwarranted. The bouquet is bright and complex, wafting from the glass in a superb blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, tree bark, chicory and a nice touch of grilled meat. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, impeccable balance and a long, still moderately tannic finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Saumur-Champigny aging gracefully. 2016-2030+. **92.**



***Bourgueil and St. Nicolas de Bourgueil***

**2015 St. Nicolas de Bourgueil “la Mine”- Yannick et Benoît Amirault**

The 2015 St. Nicolas de Bourgueil “la Mine” from Yannick et Benoît Amirault is a superb young wine, with great purity of fruit and superb soil signature on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a superb blend of sweet dark berries, cigar smoke, a



touch of tree bark, dark soil tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely transparent, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and moderately tannic finish. This is very refined this year, as this bottling can be a bit youthfully grumpy out of the blocks, but this is most emphatically not the case with this superb 2015. This is approachable today, but it really deserves at least a few years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers to emerge. 2019-2040+. **92.**

**2015 Bourgueil “la Coudraye”- Domaine Yannick et Benoît Amirault**

The 2015 la Coudraye from Yannick and Benoît Amirault is an outstanding young bottle of Bourgueil, offering up a ripe and pure bouquet of sweet dark berries, espresso, dark soil tones, cigar wrapper and a touch of tree bark in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and balance, ripe tannins, good acids and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This beautiful wine needs a bit of time in the cellar to blossom, but it is going to be superb and is a stellar value! 2019-2045+. **92+.**

**2015 Bourgueil “Jour de Soif”- Domaine du Bel Air (Pierre Gauthier)**

The 2015 Jour de Soif bottling of Bourgueil from Pierre Gauthier is a fine follow-up to the lovely 2014 version, offering up a ripe and vibrant bouquet of red and black cherries, tree bark, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a touch of raw cocoa and some tobacco leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully plush at the core, with modest tannins, fine focus and grip and a very long, slightly heady finish. The ripeness of the 2015 vintage here is in evidence on the backend, but the overall balance is still very good and this packs a lot of depth and complexity for what is designed to be an everyday bottle of Bourgueil! Good juice. 2016-2030. **91.**

**2014 Bourgueil “la Coudraye”- Domaine Yannick et Benoît Amirault**

The Amirault family’s 2014 version of la Coudraye is another very, very good bottle of Bourgueil, without the obvious ripeness and structure of the exceptional 2015, but with plenty of personality on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of cassis, saddle leather, cigar ash, dark soil tones and a bit of tree bark. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and complex, with good, but not great depth at the core, just a touch of tannin, lovely soil signature and fine focus and grip on the long finish. This is a lovely, low fat wine that is already starting to drink nicely, but will be even better with a couple years’ worth of bottle age to allow the tannins to fall away completely. 2016-2030. **90.**

**2014 Bourgueil “Diptyque”- Domaine de la Chevalerie**

The 2014 Bourgueil “Diptyque” from the Chaslot family’s Domaine de la Chevalerie is a fine example of the vintage, offering up a complex and very pure aromatic blend of sweet dark berries, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and really energetic on the backend, with a good core, fine focus and grip, just a touch of closing tannin and impressive, nascent complexity on the finish. This is quite approachable today, though it will be even better with a couple of years’ worth of bottle age, when it has had a chance to develop some of its secondary layers of complexity. Just a lovely bottle of Bourgueil that is crafted by the Chaslots for early drinking, but will age gracefully. 2016-2035. **91.**

### **2013 Bourgueil “le Grand Clos”- Domaine Yannick et Benoît Amirault**

The 2013 Grand Clos from the Amirault family is outstanding and has blossomed beautifully with a few years in bottle and is now drinking very well indeed! The deep and complex nose soars from the glass in a blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, gentle herb tones, a touch of menthol, tobacco leaf, a beautifully complex base of soil tones and a touch of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and intensely flavored, with lovely elegance and focus, modest tannins and a long, tangy and impressively soil-driven finish. This is not a blockbuster vintage of Grand Clos by any stretch of the imagination, but the wine is utterly complete and a joy to drink. 2016-2030+. **92.**

### **2012 Bourgueil “les Galichets”- Domaine de la Chevalerie**

Les Galichets is one of the top vineyards in Bourgueil and the Chaslot family produces a lovely wine from this stony, clay and limestone *terroir*. The topsoil is pretty deep here, which always gives Galichets a rock solid core of fruit, and this is clearly in evidence in the lovely 2012 version from Domaine de la Chevalerie, as the wine delivers a fine nose of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones and a classic topnote of tree bark. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and almost sappy at the core, with ripe, well-integrated tannins, fine soil signature, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is quite approachable today, but is still climbing, and another three to four years in the cellar should allow the wine to arrive at its apogee. Fine juice. 2016-2035+. **92+.**

### ***Chinon***

#### **2015 Chinon “Rive Gauche”- Château de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)**

The 2015 bottling of “Rive Gauche” from Château de la Bonnelière is really a lovely, entry level bottle of Chinon. The bouquet is pure, focused and utterly classic in profile, offering up scents of dark berries, a touch of currant leaf, gravel, tree bark and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and wide open structurally, with a good, solid core, tangy acids, fine balance and grip and a long, complex and absolutely succulent finish. This is a middleweight example of Chinon meant for early consumption, but it does not skimp on complexity or intensity of flavor! A superb value. 2016-2030. **90.**

#### **2015 Chinon “La Vigne en Véron”- Chais St. Laurent**

The 2015 Chinon “La Vigne en Véron” from Chais St. Laurent is an outstanding young bottle of Chinon, with all of the depth and intensity of the vintage beautifully displayed. The bouquet is pure, complex and classy, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, a touch of tree bark, gravelly soil tones, cigar ash and a touch of bitter chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex quite solid at the core, with moderate tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, very well-balanced and serious finish. The 2014 version of this bottling was meant for early quaffing and was very well done in that style, but the 2015 has more gravitas and is an outstanding bottle of Chinon that will be even better with a bit of bottle age, despite its fairly accessible personality out of the blocks. Fine, fine juice and a great sleeper of the vintage. 2016-2035+. **92.**

#### **2014 Chinon “les Cornuelles”- Château de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)**

The 2014 vintage of les Cornuelles from Marc Plouzeau is a superb example of the vintage, offering up a deep and fairly primary bouquet of cassis, dark berries, a bit of grilled venison, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, a touch of menthol and gentle notes of tree bark in the

upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and quite elegant out of the blocks (not always the case with the wines from this superb *terroir*, which can often produce wines which are a bit *sauvage* when young), with a fine core, ripe tannins, excellent balance and nascent complexity and a long, youthful and very promising finish. 2019-2045. **92.**

**2014 Chinon “le Clos des Roches St. Paul”- Château de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)**

The 2014 vintage of Chinon “le Clos des Roches St. Paul” from Château de la Bonnelière is the first year for both this and the Vindoux single vineyard bottlings from Monsieur Plouzeau. The 2014 Clos des Roches St. Paul is superb, jumping from the glass in a complex and very refined constellation of black cherries, dark berries, cigar wrapper, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of espresso and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a rock solid core, lovely transparency, suave, fine-grained tannins and a very long, complex and classy finish. In contrast to the more structured Vindoux bottling (please see below), the Clos des Roches St. Paul is really quite accessible out of the blocks, though this too will age very long and gracefully. A beautiful bottle. 2016-2045. **93+.**

**2014 Chinon “Vindoux” l’Intégrale- Château de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)**

The single vineyard bottling of Chinon from the *lieu à dit* of Vindoux from Marc Plouzeau is fermented and aged in six hundred liter *demi-muids* for two years prior to bottling. The 2014 version comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and delivers a superb bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, tree bark, a bit of saddle leather, dark soil tones, incipient notes of meatiness and a topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully structured, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, firm, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and still quite primary finish. This will be a terrific bottle of Chinon, but it is built to age and will demand a bit of time in the cellar to blossom. 2020-2045+. **93.**

**2013 Chinon “Vindoux” l’Intégrale- Château de la Bonnelière (Marc Plouzeau)**

The 2013 version of Vindoux from Marc Plouzeau is another superb middleweight, offering up a complex and nicely blossoming nose of cassis, dark berries, a nice touch of spice, lovely dark soil tones, cigar wrapper and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, focused and complex, with good, solid depth at the core, a bit of backend tannin and excellent balance and grip on the refined finish. The tannins are just starting to fall away here on the backend and the wine is drinking very nicely, but it will continue to soften with further bottle age. An excellent 2013 Chinon. 2016-2035. **92.**

**2013 Les Pensées de Pallus Chinon- Domaine de Pallus**

The Sourdais family’s 2013 Les Pensées de Pallus is a lovely wine, cut in the more medium-bodied style of the vintage, but offering up plenty of personality on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a lovely and wide open blend of cherries, dark berries, a touch of juniper berry, gravelly soil tones, cigar wrapper and toasty oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and wide open, with a fine core, lovely focus and complexity and a long, poised and modestly tannic and tangy finish. Really a lovely bottle for drinking over the next decade or so. 2016-2025+. **90.**

**2012 Chinon- Domaine de Pallus**

The flagship bottling of Chinon from Domaine de Pallus is lovely in 2012, with plenty of youthful complexity at play on both the nose and palate, but with the underlying structure suggesting a few more years in the cellar will be nicely rewarded. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine mix of sweet cassis, gravel, currant leaf, espresso, cigar smoke and a touch of

tobacco leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and suave on the attack, with excellent focus and balance, moderate tannins and impressive length and grip on the gently chewy finish. This is certainly tasty today, but a couple more years in the cellar will allow the tannins to fall away a bit more and the secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. Fine juice. 2018-2035. **92+**.



### *Vouvray and Montlouis*

#### **2015 Vouvray “le Petit Clos” Sec - Bernard Fouquet (Domaine des Aubisières)**

The 2015 Vouvray Sec “le Petit Clos” from Bernard Fouquet is quite ripe in the style of the vintage, but also beautifully balanced. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a fine blend of pineapple, a touch of tangerine, chalky soil tones, a touch of lanolin and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a superb core, lovely soil signature, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the zesty finish. Lovely juice. 2016-2035+. **91**.

#### **2015 Vouvray “les Girardières” Demi-Sec- Bernard Fouquet (Domaine des Aubisières)**

The 2015 Vouvray “les Girardières” from Bernard Fouquet is the estate’s Demi-Sec, though this no longer appears on the label. I found it interesting that the le Petit Clos Sec this year is sealed under natural cork, but the les Girardières is under screwcap. The wine is not yet showing any off aromatics from reduction, but is far less expressive on the nose than the le Petit Clos, tentatively offering up scents of apple, quince, lanolin and chalky soil tones. On the palate

the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and nicely plumped up with a glaze of residual sugar, with a fine core, lovely soil signature and very good grip on the long and classy finish. This has the depth and inherent balance to last very long in bottle, but under this closure, I really have no idea how long it is going to survive. But, it is really delicious out of the blocks and not hard to drink in its stylish adolescence. Decant it now, to jump start the bouquet blossoming. 2016-2030+? **91+**.

#### **2015 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Sec- Domaine Huët**

The 2015 Le Haut Lieu Sec from Domaine Huët is a ripe and fairly wide open rendition of this superb bottling, offering up a very pretty and inviting bouquet of pear, sweet quince, a bit of lanolin, lovely soil tones, a whisper of lavender and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and fairly crisp, with a very good core of fruit, fine soil signature, good, solid acids and fine length and grip on the still quite primary finish. Then focus here is not quite what one expects from this bottling in most vintages, but Sec is certainly not the strength of the 2015 vintage in Vouvray. Structurally, this wine is fairly accessible right out of the blocks, but this has not yet begun to develop any of its secondary layers of complexity and really deserves at least a few years in the cellar to blossom. But, it will not require extended cellaring to start to drink very well. 2016-2035+. **91+**.

#### **2015 Vouvray “Le Mont” Sec- Domaine Huët**

Domaine Huët’s 2015 Le Mont Sec is deeper and more precise than the Le Haut Lieu Sec on the nose, offering up a complex and serious aromatic blend of quince, fresh pineapple, hints of honeycomb, a superb base of soil, lanolin and a touch of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very long, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent nascent complexity, fairly low acids for this bottling, but lovely focus and balance on the very long and classy backend. This has the lower acidity of the vintage, but also the superb structure of Le Mont and should age longer than most dry 2015 Vouvrais. 2016-2050. **93**.

#### **2015 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët**

The 2015 Le Haut Lieu Demi-Sec is outstanding from Domaine Huët, as the touch of botrytis here gives the wine impressive concentration and aromatic lift. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a nascently complex blend of pineapple, quince, a touch of tangerine, bee pollen, chalky soil tones, lanolin and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, bright and beautifully balanced, with great concentration at the core, lovely focus and grip and a very long, still primary, but very promising finish. Again, the acids are not overly snappy here, but the concentrating effect of a bit of noble rot has elevated them a touch and they are more than adequate to carry this wine far, far into the future. This has great depth without undue weight. 2016-2065. **93+**.

#### **2015 Vouvray “Le Mont” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët**

The 2015 Le Mont Demi-Sec from Domaine Huët is an outstanding young wine, with even more depth and potential than the superb Le Haut Lieu Demi. The bouquet is bottomless, delivering scents of pineapple, sweet quince, incipient notes of honey, chalky minerality, a touch of lanolin, floral tones redolent of buttercups and lovely, esthery citrus elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, beautifully balanced and displays stunning depth at the core, with lovely acidity (particularly for the vintage!), great focus and grip and a very, very long, primary and exceptional finish. This does not have the backend cut or grip of a vintage such as 2007 or 2008, but it is going to be a great example of Domaine Huët Demi-Sec. It is deceptively easy to drink today, but its true apogee is at least a decade or more out from the vintage! 2016-2075. **95**.

### **2015 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët**

The 2015 Demi-Sec from the Clos du Bourg is the lowest level of sweetness from this vineyard in the Domaine Huët stable in 2015 and the wine has magical potential. The bouquet shows a bit more botrytis influence than is the case in the superb Le Mont Demi-Sec, soaring from the glass in a gently glazed constellation of pineapple, a hint of guava, candied quince, lanolin, a touch of honeycomb, beautiful underlying minerality and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with a lovely sense of vinosity already in evidence, despite the wine’s still youthful profile. The acids are bright and beautifully buried in the fruit, with excellent soil signature, lovely focus and grip and a very long, beautifully balanced finish. This is more overtly exotic in personality than the Le Mont Demi-Sec in this vintage, but it is hard to say that it will ultimately be superior- perhaps just different. Another great wine. 2016-2075. **95.**

### **2015 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Moelleux- Domaine Huët**

The 2015 Le Haut Lieu Moelleux from Domaine Huët is a superb wine in the making, with its glaze of botrytis beautifully managed and the wine showing excellent potential on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a pure and complex mélange of sweet quince, orange, honey, just a whisper of lanolin, beautiful chalky soil tones, a whisper of the leather to come, citrus zest and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with bright acids, a lovely core and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, refined and nicely glazed finish. This will be all apricot, honey and tea leaves in the future, but it is so good to drink out of the blocks, that it is going to be hard not to open bottles in its more exotic youthful period. 2016-2085. **94.**

### **2015 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux- Domaine Huët**

The 2015 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux from Domaine Huët is yet another brilliant wine from the estate in this vintage, soaring from the glass in a nicely botrytized blend of apple, quince, honeycomb, dried flowers, a touch of dusty chalkiness, orange peel and an exotic topnote of sweet corn in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and more primary in personality than the Le Haut Lieu Moelleux, with a rock solid core, great focus and grip, lovely framing acids and impeccable balance on the very, very long and stunning finish. This is less developed than the 2015 Le Haut Lieu Moelleux, but it seems to have even superior potential for the long haul! Great juice. 2020-2085. **95.**

### **2015 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Moelleux Première Trie- Domaine Huët**

Domaine Huët’s 2015 Première Trie from the Le Haut Lieu vineyard is more primary and reserved in personality than the straight Moelleux bottling, but deeper, more pristine and ever more promising. The bouquet shows a beautiful glaze of clean botrytis in its aromatic blend of pineapple, sweet quince, tangerine, honey, a lovely cornerstone of soil, orange peel, dried flowers and a bit of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and full-bodied, with marvelous depth and balance, bright acids, great complexity to come and stunning length and bounce on the superbly energetic and seamless finish. This has a bit of that early vinosity that was found in the Clos du Bourg Demi-Sec and augurs very, very well for its future development! 2020-2085. **95+.**

### **2015 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux Première Trie- Domaine Huët**

The 2015 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux Première Trie from Domaine Huët is utterly brilliant wine, which is at least fifteen years away from truly blossoming, but is so good right now that it is going to be next to impossible not to drink this wine in the blush of youth! The stunning nose shows a gorgeous glazing of botrytis in its constellation of pineapple, honeyed

quince, sweet grapefruit, lovely minerality, orange blossoms, a hint of lavender, citrus oils, dried flowers and just a whisper of the new leather that will arrive with bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly seamless in balance, with a great core, laser-like focus, superb nascent complexity and lovely grip on the endless, vibrant and dancing finish. Magical juice. 2025-2085. **97.**

**2015 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Moelleux Première Trie- Domaine Huët**

The Clos du Bourg” Moelleux Première Trie from Domaine Huët is another absolutely stunning young example of the 2015 vintage. The very complex bouquet wafts from the glass in one of the most beautifully-botrytized blends I have ever had the pleasure to experience, with notes of pineapple, candied quince, incipient notes of apricot, a whisper of lanolin, honeycomb, a lovely touch of soil, a bit of orange zest, incipient notes of heather and barley sugar, dried flowers, sweet corn and just a whisper of browned butter in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and alluring in its promise of stunning complexity to come, with a great core, bright, zesty acids, laser-like focus and stunning length and grip on the still youthful, but utterly suave finish. This does not have the spine of acidity for perfection, but that is really all that is missing here! Like the 2015 Le Mont Première Trie, this is delicious already, thought it really should not be touched for close to another decade! 2025-2085. **98.**

**2015 Montlouis “Touche-Mitaine”- Le Rocher des Violettes (Xavier Weisskopf)**

The 2015 Montlouis “Touche-Mitaine” from Le Rocher des Violettes is a Sec bottling, though there is no mention of this on the label. The wine is young and promising, offering up scents of quince, lanolin, a bit of chalk dust, dried flowers and citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and very nicely balanced, with a fine core, bright acids and lovely soil signature on the backend. The finish is long and focused, but also still quite primary, and more complexity will emerge here with extended bottle age. Fine juice. 2016-2030+. **92.**

**2014 Vouvray “le Petit Clos” Sec - Bernard Fouquet (Domaine des Aubisières)**

The 2014 le Petit Clos Vouvray Sec bottling from Monsieur Fouquet is developing beautifully and has really blossomed over the year since I last tasted a bottle. The bouquet is deep, complex and utterly classic, offering up scents of sweet quince, apple, lanolin, chalky soil tones, a hint of beeswax and a gentle topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, a wide open personality and lovely length on the well-balanced finish. This is drinking beautifully at the present time. 2016-2030. **90.**

**2013 Vouvray Sec- Laurent Kraft**

The 2013 Vouvray Sec from Laurent Kraft is not a particularly successful example of the vintage. The wandering nose offers up notes of chalk dust, citrus peel, quince and wet wool. On the palate the wine is medium-full and concave, with green acids, little mid-palate depth and a borderline sour finish. Not the kind of wine I would have bottled and put my name on the label. ???

**2013 Montlouis “Négrette”- Le Rocher des Violettes (Xavier Weisskopf)**

The 2013 Montlouis “Négrette” from Xavier Weisskopf is finished as a Sec, though I do not see this anywhere on the front or back labels. The bouquet is still youthful, but precise and vibrant, offering up notes of quince, lemon peel, chalky soil tones, lanolin and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with good, not great



depth at the core, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This wine is approachable today, but still a bit buttoned up behind its girdle of acidity at the present time, and it will be even better with a bit more bottle age. A very strong example of the vintage. 2018-2030+. **90.**

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

I have been very, very fortunate in my lifetime to drink some of Domaine Huët’s greatest wines, but if I had to pick one single vintage since 1947 here to nominate as my favorite, it would probably be the brilliant 1989s, which simply have everything that I adore in great Vouvray. The 1989 Le Mont Première Trie is still a handful of years away from complete blossoming, but its greatness is already manifest on both the nose and palate and it is all too easy to drink this wine right now! The bouquet is a stunning array of orange, apricot, heather, honey, chalky soil tones, orange peel, the first vestiges of barley sugar and just a whisper of remaining lanolin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and laser-like in its focus, with a bottomless core, great acids and outstanding length and grip on the still slightly shut down finish. Aromatically, this wine is already hitting on all cylinders, but on the palate, it is still asking for just a bit more patience. It will be magical! 2022-2085+. **96+.**

#### **1989 Vouvray Moelleux Première Trie- Domaine François Pinon**

I had never previously tasted any of the 1989s from François Pinon and this Moelleux Première Trie bottling was absolutely beautiful on both the nose and palate. It does not possess the same bottomless depth of the more powerfully constructed Le Mont Première Trie from Domaine Huët that was served alongside of it, but it has plenty of intensity and absolutely superb complexity. The bouquet is simply stunning, wafting from the glass in a blend of pineapple, apricot, a touch of wet wool, honey, salty soil tones and an exotic topnote of anise. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and moderately sweet, with a lovely core, great soil inflection, vibrant acids and a very long, complex and dancing finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Vouvray that has now reached its apogee, but has decades of life still ahead of it. 2016-2050. **94.**

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

It had been a bit more than three years since I last tasted the 1959 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Première Trie from Domaine Huët and time seems to not have even moved for this magnificent wine. The bouquet remains vibrant and utterly brilliant, soaring from the glass in a blend of apricot, brown butter, hazelnuts, honey, orange peel, lovely soil tones, tea leaves and a topnote of heather. On the palate the wine is pure, deep and full-bodied, with a marvelous core of fruit, breathtaking complexity, zesty acids and laser-like focus on the very, very long and electric finish. One of the legends of the twentieth century from the Loire! 2016-260+. **98.**

#### ***Touraine Blanc***

##### **2015 Touraine Sauvignon Blanc- Clos de la Grange**

The 2015 Sauvignon Blanc from the Clos de la Grange is a very pretty example, once it has had a bit of air to blossom, as it is a tad tight when first poured. With some air, it offers up a bright and zesty nose of lemon, tart orange, chalky soil tones, a touch of grassiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and juicy on the attack, with a good core, bouncy acids and good length and grip on the still youthful finish. Good juice, with plenty of personality for its price point. 2016-2019. **88.**

### **2015 “Petit Le Mont” Sauvignon Blanc- Foucher-Lebrun**

As I noted last year, the “Petit Le Mont” bottling of sauvignon blanc from Sancerre producer of Foucher-Lebrun hails from vineyards on the border between Touraine and Haut Poitu. The 2015 is a lovely wine, offering up a stylish bouquet of sweet grapefruit, fresh-cut grass, citrus blossoms, plenty of chalky soil tones and a topnote of anise. On the palate the wine is medium-full, round and quite solid at the core, with good framing acids, sound balance and very good length on the bouncy finish. This is not razor-sharp in terms of focus, but it has plenty of depth and stuffing for its appellation. 2016-2018. **88.**

### **2015 Sauvignon “le Blanc de la Mariée”- François Plouzeau**

This lovely Touraine Sauvignon Blanc shows off the ripeness of the 2015 vintage to fine effect on both the nose and the palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of sweet grapefruit, chalky soil tones, spring flowers, fresh mown grass and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and juicy at the core, with fine balance and nice length and grip on the bouncy and wide open finish. This has a lot of personality for its price point! 2016-2020. **89.**

### ***Touraine Rouge***

#### **2015 Touraine Rouge- François Chidaine**

François Chidaine is one of the finest winemakers in all of the Loire Valley, with his superbly elegant Montlouis and Vouvray bottlings properly exalted. However, his 2015 Touraine Rouge, which is composed of a blend of Côt, Cabernet Franc and Pineau d’Aunis is outstanding and a terrific value. The bouquet is deep and classy, offering up a fine blend of black cherries, tree bark, plenty of smokiness, espresso, peppercorn and a fine base of soil tones that will turn autumnal in character with a bit of bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely plump at the core, with modest tannins, fine balance and a very long, complex and palate-staining finish. This is drinking beautifully out of the blocks, but it has the stuffing and structural integrity to also age very gracefully. 2016-2030+. **91.**

#### **2014 Le Rouge des Cornus (Cabernet Franc)- François Plouzeau**

François Plouzeau’s 2014 Le Rouge des Cornus is a lovely, middleweight bottle of cabernet franc. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of dark berries, black cherries, tobacco leaf, tree bark, a good base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and still youthful, with a good core, a bit of backend tannin, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. This could use a year of bottle age to more fully blossom. 2017-2025+. **87+.**

#### **2014 Côt “Vieilles Vignes”- Le Rocher des Violettes (Xavier Weisskopf)**

The 2014 Côt “Vieilles Vignes” from Xavier Weisskopf is a touch reductive when first opened, but once it is given a bit of air, it blossoms nicely to offer up a fine aromatic blend of dark berries, tree bark, a fine base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with a good core, sound complexity and lovely length and grip on the vibrant finish. These vines were planted before World War II. The 2014 just needs a bit of air prior to serving to open up, and once it does, there is a lot going on in the glass! 2016-2023. **88.**

#### **2014 Cabernet Franc- Le Rocher des Violettes (Xavier Weisskopf)**

The 2014 Cabernet Franc from Le Rocher des Violettes is even better than the excellent Côt, wafting from the glass in a pure and complex nose of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, a touch of chicory, dark soil tones and a nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and intensely flavored, with excellent focus and grip, with just a

touch of backend tannin and lovely balance on the long and classy finish. This is really a lovely middleweight example of cabernet franc, and again, this is old vines. 2016-2025+. **89+**.

### ***Coteaux du Giennois Blanc***

*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.*

### **2015 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc- Clément et Florian Berthier**

The 2015 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc from Clément et Florian Berthier is a lovely middleweight and a poster child for why this appellation is starting to attract so much attention from importers in search of the vivacity of Sancerre at a lower tariff! The bouquet is bright and classy, jumping from the glass in a mix of gooseberry, lime blossoms, chalky soil tones, cut grass and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and succulent on the attack, with a good core, sound acids and very good length on the focused finish. The lower acids of the 2015 vintage are evident here, so this wine will want drinking over the next year, but this has serious personality for its price point! 2016-2018. **88**.

### **2015 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 2015 version is excellent and one of the best values that I tasted in preparation of this report! The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of gooseberry, lime zest, a lovely base of flinty soil, a touch of cut grass and a whisper of petrol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and crisp, with a lovely core of fruit, sound acids and lovely length and bounce on the well-balanced finish. This is more personality than some examples of Pouilly-Fumé I have tasted from 2015! 2016-2018. **89**.

### **2015 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc “Terre de Caillotte”- Clément et Florian Berthier**

As I noted last year, the Terre de Caillotte bottling from the Berthiers is produced from a parcel of vines that lies across the river from Sancerre. The small, chalky stones known as “les Caillottes” are one of the three defining *terroirs* of the Sancerre appellation, and fairly rare outside of the AOC proper. The 2015 Terre de Caillotte from the domaine is a fine follow-up to their very strong 2014 version, offering up a complex nose of green apple, gooseberry, chalky minerality, white flowers and discreet notes of grassiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and quite elegant in profile, with fine framing acids, impeccable balance and impressive length and grip on the wide open and classy finish. This is really tasty and a great value! 2016-2020. **89+**.

### **2015 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc- Domaine de Villargeau**

2015 Coteaux du Giennois Blanc from Domaine de Villargeau is a lovely bottle of sauvignon blanc, offering up a classic bouquet of gooseberry, tart orange, cut grass and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and youthful, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, snappy acids and good length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. This is a young wine that is still pretty tightly-knit, but with impressive depth for the appellation, and it will continue to blossom over the coming months and offers up plenty of personality and is a good value. 2016-2018. **87+**.

### ***Coteaux du Giennois Rouge***

#### **2014 Coteaux du Giennois “Pinot Noir” Rouge- Clément et Florian Berthier**

The 2014 Coteaux du Giennois Rouge from Clément et Florian Berthier is the first to note that the wine is made entirely from pinot noir on the back label. The bouquet a touch reductive when first opened and needs a bit of time in decanter to blossom, but eventually comes around to offer a nicely red fruity mélange of cherries, strawberries, damp herbs, a fine base of chalky soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and gently weedy today, with a good core, tangy acids, fine balance and grip and impressive intensity of flavor on the long and focused finish. Like the 2013 version, this could use a bit of time in the bottle to blossom, and though it is only moderately ripe, there are elements here that already work well at the table and this characteristic will accelerate once the wine has a chance to gather itself with a bit of bottle age. I cannot wait to taste this bottling in a more favorable growing season! 2017-2025. **87+**.

#### **2014 Coteaux du Giennois “L’Inédit” Pinot Noir- Clément et Florian Berthier**

The Coteaux du Giennois “L’Inédit” Pinot Noir from Clément et Florian Berthier is made from a limestone-based vineyard that is now farmed organically and is planted with thirty to thirty-five year-old vines. The wine is a tad riper on the nose than the regular bottling, offering up scents of cherries, quince, woodsmoke, gamebird, dried thyme, pepper and a beautiful base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and very transparent, with fine intensity of flavor, bright acids, just a touch of tannin and excellent length and grip on the gently weedy finish. In 2014, which was a difficult year to ripen the pinot noir, this is really impressively ripe and pure, and thought it still closes with a touch of backend *herbacité* on the finish, this is a very successful 2014 and is not hard to drink today. I might still tuck it away for a couple of years and let it blossom completely, but it is a very successful example of the vintage in this sector of the Loire. 2017-2025+. **89**.

### ***Quincy and Menetou-Salon***

#### **2015 Quincy- Domaine Sylvain Bailly**

I know Monsieur Bailly’s Sancerres best, but he is based in the village of Quincy and his 2015 version is very tasty. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of lemon, gooseberry, plenty of chalkiness, white flowers and just a touch of cut grass. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with good, but not great depth at the core, bright framing acids and good backend intensity on the long and vibrant finish. This is just a touch gentle on the attack, but really has impressive backend bounce and grip. 2016-2020. **89**.

#### **2015 Menetou-Salon “Morogues”- Domaine Henry Pellé**

I used to think that this was a single vineyard bottling, but it turns out that this wine is sourced from seven different parcels, which have the highest elevation and are the coolest sites owned by the Pellé family in Menetou-Salon. This accounts for the consistent refinement and elegance of this cuvée, year in and year out! The 2015 Morogues from Domaine Pellé is beautifully complex and refined in personality, offering up a superb bouquet of lemon, a touch of tangerine, gentle grassiness, chalky minerality, spring flowers and a topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with bright acids, a fine core, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex finish. To my palate, this bottling is the gold standard of Menetou-Salon and the 2015 is simply excellent! 2016-2020. **93**.



### **2015 Quincy- Philippe Portier**

The 2015 Quincy from Philippe Portier is a good, solid, workman-like example of the vintage. The bouquet is very grassy in its mélange of gooseberry, grapefruit, damp grass and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nicely generous on the attack, with a good core, bright acids and a distinct note of bitterness on the backend like eating grapefruit pith that keeps the score down considerably. This is okay, but should be better, particularly for a 2015 Quincy. 2016-2020. **82.**

### **2015 Quincy- Domaine de Villalin**

The 2015 Quincy from Domaine de Villalin is a fine follow-up to their excellent 2014 version, offering up an exuberant bouquet of gooseberry, pink grapefruit, chalky soil tones, a touch of petrol, lime blossoms and fresh-cut grass. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and juicy on the attack, with a fine core, bright backend acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and classy finish. I love good Quincy and this is very, very good Quincy! Bring on the *Fruits de Mers*! 2016-2020+. **92.**

### **2014 Menetou-Salon “les Blanchais”- Domaine Henry Pellé**

I used to pour the single vineyard “les Blanchais” bottling from the Pellé family by the glass back in my sommelier days, and I was very happy to see it is once again being brought into the US market. These are the oldest vines the domaine owns, having been planted in 1966, and the wine sees some barrel-fermentation and aging in casks, in addition to stainless steel. The

2014 les Blanchais is lovely, but it shows the less sustained ripeness of the vintage in its complex nose of grapefruit, damp grass, a touch of white pepper, lovely soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. This is a very, very good 2014, with the depth and structure to age nicely in the bottle. I cannot wait to try the 2015 version! 2016-2025. **90+.**

### ***Pouilly-Fumé***

#### **2015 Pouilly-Fumé “les Pentes”- Domaine Serge Dagueneau et Filles**

The 2015 “les Pentes” bottling of Pouilly-Fumé from Domaine Serge Dagueneau et Filles is excellent, offering up plenty of depth and complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up plenty of fruit in its mélange of gooseberry, grapefruit, fresh-cut grass, hints of the petrol to come, spring flowers and flinty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and grassy, with a lovely core, bright acids and very good length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. This is excellent Pouilly-Fumé that will blossom nicely with a bit more bottle age, but is already drinking with plenty of personality! 2016-2024. **91+.**

#### **2015 Pouilly-Fumé- Domaine Hervé Seguin**

This was the first time that I had tasted a vintage of Pouilly-Fumé from Domaine Seguin. The start of picking was historically early in this appellation in 2015 and one can see a bit of this influence on the nose of this wine, which offers up scents of grapefruit, petrol, a touch of grassiness and a fairly modest base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and gently grassy in personality, with a good core, zesty acids and good length and grip on the finish. This does not (yet?) have a lot of personality on the nose, but it is sneaky long on the palate and far more expressive on the backend than the fairly timid bouquet suggests. Not bad. 2016-2020. **88.**

#### **2015 Pouilly-Fumé “Cuvée Prestige”- Domaine Hervé Seguin**

The 2015 Cuvée Prestige from Domaine Hervé Seguin is not quite as good as the regular bottling in this vintage, as the wine is rather heavy-handed in personality. The wine is a cellar selection of the best lots of the vintage, with an eye towards blending the three major *terroirs* of the appellation, but the 2015 version was not signing at the time I tasted it. The wine is ripe, but a bit discordant on the nose at the present time, offering up scents of green apple, grapefruit, damp grass, a touch of cat pee sound minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit bitter on the backend, with a good core of fruit, sound framing acids and good length and grip on the rather four-square finish. Today, this is rather plodding in personality, and it is hard to envision it somehow learning to dance on the palate with bottle age. 2016-2020+. **84.**

#### **2014 Pouilly-Fumé “Clos des Chaudoux”- Domaine Serge Dagueneau et Filles**

The 2014 Clos des Chaudoux from Serge Dagueneau and his two daughters, Valerie and Florence, is a fine follow-up to their very strong 2013 version. The wine is deep, ripe and complex on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of lime, a touch of orange, grassy overtones, citrus peel and a lovely base of flinty soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, bright acids and plenty of length and grip on the well-balanced and classy finish. The Dagueneau house style is for later harvesting and this shows in the stylistic profile of this wine, but there is nothing heavy or over the top here, just all the personality of perfectly ripe sauvignon blanc in a fine *terroir*. 2016-2020. **92.**

## ***Sancerre***

### **2015 Sancerre “Terroirs”- Domaine Sylvain Bailly (Bué)**

The 2015 Sancerre “Terroirs” bottling from Sylvain Bailly is a very youthful example of the vintage, but it is a bit disjointed out of the blocks and could use a bit of time in the bottle to snap into a more precise focus. The bouquet offers up scents of tart orange, lemon, chalky soil tones, a bit of grassiness and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a rock solid core, good soil signature, brisk acids and fine length and grip on the youthful finish. This is still quite undeveloped, but it is long and has really good energy on the finish, so if it snaps into focus as it sees a bit of bottle age, it will be excellent. 2017-2025. **89-91+**.

### **2015 Sancerre “Le Mont”- Foucher-Lebrun (Alligny)**

The 2015 Sancerre “Le Mont” from Foucher-Lebrun is ripe and beautifully expressive on the nose, jumping from the glass in a blaze of gooseberry, lime, tangerine, chalky minerality and a discreet topnote of fresh-cut grass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and juicy on the attack, with a fine core, good soil signature, sound acids and just a bit of backend heat poking out on the long and extroverted finish. This reminds me a lot of many of the 1989 Sancerres when they were first released, which I know is dating me, but really describes the style of this wine. It is not the most refined example of Sancerre, but it has stuffing and personality to burn! I would score this a few points higher, but that bit of alcohol on the finish worries me a bit for wine’s evolution in bottle. 2016-2023. **90**.

### **2015 Sancerre- Thierry Merlin Cherrier (Bué)**

The 2015 Sancerre regular bottling from Thierry Merlin is excellent, as it delivers the ripeness of the vintage, coupled beautifully to fine minerality and very good, vibrant structural attributes. The bouquet is pure and extroverted, jumping from the glass in a mix of lime, green apple, lovely, limestone minerality, a touch of grassiness, hints of anise and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a juicy core, fine acids and lovely focus and grip on the complex finish. This is fine, fine juice and I cannot wait to taste Monsieur Merlin’s 2015 vintage from le Chêne Marchand next year! 2016-2023. **92**.

### **2015 Sancerre “Vieilles Vignes”- Pierre Morin (Bué)**

The 2015 Sancerre V.V. from Pierre Morin is a lovely example of the vintage, with plenty of ripe fruit beautifully supported by bright acids and lovely minerality. The bouquet is textbook Bué Sancerre, wafting from the glass in a blend of gooseberry, lime, fresh-cut grass, chalky soil tones and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is succulent, full-bodied and vibrant, with a good core, lovey, nascent complexity, sound acids and fine length and grip on the pure and zesty finish. This is a very tasty drink out of the blocks. 2016-2020. **90**.

### **2015 Sancerre- Domaine des Vieux Pruniers (Christian Thirot-Fournier) (Bué)**

The 2015 Sancerre from Domaine des Vieux Pruniers is nicely reticent on the nose, offering up a still quite primary blend of lemon, tart orange, chalky minerality, gentle grassiness, a touch of white pepper and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, grassy and rock solid at the core, with fine mineral drive, brisk acids and very good length and grip on the still quite youthful and grassy finish. This is structured more like a 2014 than an extroverted 2015, which may augur very well for its evolution in bottle. I wonder if this was picked on the early side to avoid higher alcohol levels. 2016-2025. **90**.



**2014 Sancerre “le Chêne Marchand”- Thierry Merlin Cherrier (Bué)**

Thierry Merlin has just under a hectare of vines in the great vineyard of le Chêne Marchand in Bué, and he bottles this wine on its own after aging it a full year on its fine lees prior to its *mise*. I love this *terroir*, but do not get to taste too many high quality examples, and Monsieur Merlin’s is certainly a very welcome new bottling to cross my desk. The bouquet on the 2014 is pure and vibrant, wafting from the glass in a blend of gooseberry, lime blossoms, a touch of tangerine, beautifully complex soil tones, a touch of anise and a gentle topnote of grassiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, bright acids, fine focus and impressive length and grip on the pure and seamless finish. This is very high class juice! 2016-2023+. **92+**.

**2014 Sancerre “Cuvée François de la Grange de Montigny”- Henry Natter (Montigny)**

The 2014 Sancerre “Cuvée François de la Grange de Montigny” from Henry Natter is fermented and raised in old *foudres*, giving the wine a lovely roundness on the palate. The bouquet on the 2014 is deep and nicely developed, offering up scents of lime peel, tart orange, a touch of beeswax, chalky soil tones, cut grass and a hint of anise in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and wide open structurally, with a good core, sound acids and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. This does not have a lot of structural reserve and will want drinking over the next year or two, but it has plenty of character. 2016-2018. **90**.

**2014 Sancerre “Cuvée les Angeslots” V.V.- Dom. Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy (Maimbray)**

The Cuvée les Angeslots from the Reverdy family is produced from seventy-five year-old vines, and in the 2014 vintage, this wine has turned out beautifully. The bouquet is pure, focused and still fairly primary, offering up scents of gooseberry, lemon, dusty chalkiness, spring flowers, gentle notes of grassiness and just a hint of anise in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and balance, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. This is quite approachable today, but I have the sense that more complexity will emerge if the wine is given a year or two more of bottle age. 2016-2025+. **91+**.

**2014 Sancerre “Origine”- Mathias et Emile Roblin (Maimbray)**

The 2014 “Origine” from Mathias et Emile Roblin is a lovely and quite classic bottle of Sancerre, offering up a vibrant and complex nose of gooseberry, lime zest, fresh-cut grass, lovely limestone soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with an excellent core, fine mineral drive on the backend and a long, classy finish. This is a fine, fine bottle of Sancerre. 2016-2020+. **92**.

**2014 Sancerre “Clos la Néore”- Edmund et Anne Vatan (Chavignol)**

The 2014 Sancerre “Clos la Néore” from Edmund et Anne Vatan is a magical wine in the making. The bouquet is deep, pure and still very youthful, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of lime, pear, fresh almond, a touch of mint, a bit of water cress, a multi-faceted base of limestone minerality, perhaps a hint of cut grass and incipient notes of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and like a blade of minerality cutting through the mouth, with a rock solid core, laser-like focus and great cut and grip on the very long, seamless and electric finish. This is listed at 13.5 percent octane, but seems fairly cool in the mouth for that level. This may well age like the lovely 2002, which I still have several bottles of in the cellar and which has unfolded brilliantly with the passage of time. 2020-2055+. **95**.



### **2013 Sancerre “Ammonites”- Mathias et Emile Roblin (Maimbray)**

The Roblin brothers make a reserve bottling of Sancerre in top vintages, which they call Ammonites. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and bottled without fining or filtration. The 2013 Ammonites is a lovely wine, with a high-toned bouquet of tart orange, gooseberry, lime peel, a fine base of chalky minerality, spring flowers and a very gentle topnote of fresh-cut grass. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and intensely flavored, with bright acids, good focus and grip and a long, youthfully complex finish. This is still a fairly young and tightly-knit wine and another year or two of bottle age will allow it to more fully blossom on the palate. Good juice. 2017-2025. **91+**.

### **2006 Sancerre “Clos la Néore”- Edmund Vatan (Chavignol)**

The 2006 vintage of Clos la Néore from Edmund Vatan is drinking very well at age ten and is just starting to enter into its prime. The bouquet offers up a pure and quite wide open blend of candied lime, complex botanicals, beeswax, crystalline minerality, licorice and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, laser-like focus and great length and grip on the pure and very complex finish. A beautiful bottle of wine with years and years of life still ahead of it, but which is now really starting to drink well. It is hard to believe that nearly a decade has passed since I last tasted the 2006 vintage of this superb wine. 2016-2035+. **95**.

### ***Sancerre Rosé***

#### **2015 Sancerre Rosé- Mathias et Emile Roblin**

The 2015 Sancerre Rosé from brothers Mathias and Emile Roblin is quite a tasty example, offering up lovely brightness on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of white cherries, tangerine, lovely, chalky soil tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and succulent, with a good core, sound framing acids and good length and grip on the focused finish. The backend closes with a touch of cherry skin and plenty of limestone minerality. This is a touch heavier in style, but that may be as much a reflection of the vintage as the Roblins. 2016-2020. **87.**

### ***Sancerre Rouge***

#### **2014 Sancerre Rouge- Henry Natter (Montigny)**

The 2014 Sancerre Rouge from Henry Natter is a very pretty example, offering up a bright and complex nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, fresh herb tones, chalky soil, a touch of pepper and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and moderately structured, with a good core, fine focus and grip, and a long, modestly tannic and tangy finish. This is a very well-made and classic bottle of Sancerre rouge and will need a couple of years in the cellar to blossom, but will prove to be a lovely middleweight when it is ready to drink. 2019-2030+. **89+.**

#### **2014 Sancerre Rouge- Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy (Maimbray)**

The 2014 Sancerre Rouge from Pascal et Nicolas Reverdy is a lovely young wine, with a bit of the smoked herb tones one finds in young Sancerre rouge, coupled to really lovely purity and depth of fruit. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful mix of cherries, red berries, grassy herb tones, a bit of pepper, chalky soil tones and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is young, very tangy and structured, with its full-bodied format tightly-knit behind bouncy acids and a fair bit of tannin. Today the wine is weedy and tight, but there is a good core of fruit and lovely focus, and I would be willing to bet that with five or six years in the cellar, this is going to be a very interesting bottle! It is not particularly ripe and will probably always have a bit of *herbacité* in its profile, but there is depth, serious length and promise here as well for the intrepid. 2021-2045. **88+.**

## THE BEAUTIFUL 1985 VINTAGE IN THE NORTHERN RHÔNE



At the end of August of this year, I was invited to participate in a superb evening of 1985 northern Rhône wines held at the Hillside Supper Club in San Francisco. As this was one of the very first Rhône vintages that I sold in my early merchant days (which started with the equally fine 1983s a couple of years earlier), I was delighted to be able to join a small group on a lovely summer evening in San Francisco and revisit many of the wines of my youth. Our lineup was very interesting, as it featured most of the top wines of the era from the communes of Cornas and Côte-Rôtie, but no examples of Hermitage, as this was just the luck of the draw from the cellars from which the range of wines was gleaned. Looking back through my recent tasting notes to see if I could augment our fine lineup, the only 1985 Hermitage I had tasted in the last few years was from Gérard Chave, as I have simply not crossed paths with the Jaboulet bottling of La Chapelle from this vintage in a long, long time. However, given the amount of vinous fireworks that were on display on this particular evening of Cornas and Côte-Rôtie from 1985, there was no one at the table that was pining for some Hermitage in the lineup! Other than the wines we tasted on this evening, the only other note that I have added to round out this article is the note on the 1985 Clape Cornas, as it was not included in our San Francisco tasting and should be represented here, so I have printed my most recent note from a tasting back in the autumn of 2013 in this report.

1985 is a very interesting and important historical vintage in this era of the northern Rhône, for in many ways it marked the point of transition from the hardscrabble era of the past in this region to today's epoch of a well-known and highly sought-after wines in the international marketplace. A great many of the old traditionalists were still very active in 1985, with producers such as Noël Verset, Marius Gentaz, Joseph Jamet, Gérard Chave and Albert Dervieux at the top of their games and crafting their wines in their old school styles. Of course, by the time of the 1985 vintage, the fame of Marcel Guigal was already quite fully established, as he really began to gain a widespread following for his own particular style of northern Rhône wines by the vintages of the late 1970s and early 1980s and he was at the peak of his popularity by the time his 1985s were released. But, the pull of the Guigal style (which included riper, later-harvested fruit, complete destemming and high percentages of new oak) had not yet reached its commercial peak and attracted the younger generation of winegrowers in the area (as would be the case within a few more years), so other than the Guigal wines themselves, most of the very best wines in 1985 in the northern Rhône remained quite classically styled. By the end of the decade and on into the 1990s, this would no longer be the case. So it is interesting, a bit more than thirty years out from the vintage, to take stock of how one of the last vintages that included predominantly old school winemaking philosophies has stood the test of time and where these wines are today in their evolutions.

Back in 1987 and 1988, when the 1985 northern Rhône wines were being released, the reputation of the vintage was not quite as high as one might imagine today. It was a warm summer in the region and the growing season was quite favorable, but the resulting wines were seen as a bit too easy-going out of the blocks and perhaps would offer up too much early appeal, at the expense of their potential longevity. At the time, the more tannic and classically structured 1983 vintage was considered superior for the long haul, and as the decade closed with further top vintages, the quartet from 1988 through 1991 was also considered superior overall to the 1985s. The spring was a bit slow out of the blocks in 1985 and the vines were behind schedule early on, but the very dry and warm summer weather allowed maturation to catch up nicely, so that by the time of harvest, everything was only one week behind where it would have been with a hot summer and *vignerons* were quite content with the fine potential of the crop. The Barge family began picking on October 1<sup>st</sup> of 1985, alongside most of their traditionalist peers, with perhaps the Guigal team waiting a few days longer for a bit more ripeness to arrive. The weather was beautiful for the harvest in 1985- sunny and not too hot- in contrast to previous years such as 1982 and 1983, when the grapes were collected under very high temperatures and torrid conditions.

Stylistically, from the outset, the 1985 northern Rhône wines showed style and grace, with ripe, plump and generous fruit tones nicely grounded in a chassis of fine-grained, suave tannins. They were not all that dissimilar to the styles of wines emerging from both Bordeaux and Burgundy as well in '85, and from the start, there were those who felt that this vintage would fall in the good, but not great camp, as it lacked the firm spine of tannin to make old bones. The flip side was that the wines tasted quite delicious in their youth, which was in notable contrast to the almost stern structural side of the youthful 1983s that had preceded the '85s as the previous top flight vintage, and even a fairly structured wine like Noël Verset's 1985 Cornas was quite approachable, succulent and a joy to drink in its youth in this vintage! This did not hurt the commercial appeal of the wines by any stretch of the imagination and the commonly shared

impression in the market was that the 1985 vintage was perfect for early drinking, while waiting for the chewier and ultimately more serious 1983s to mature with extended bottle age. A similar market impression would return a few years later with the 1991s in the northern Rhône, which were often drunk up early on while folks waited on their 1988s, 1989s and 1990s to shed some of their tannic clout. However, interestingly, when one looks back on those vintages today, with the perspective of twenty to thirty years passage of time, it is hard not to say that the two vintages with the more refined balances out of the blocks, 1985 and 1991, were not ultimately at least the qualitative equals of the very finest of this great stretch of vintages in the region. Today, the 1985s have gained a bit more fame with the passage of time and their excellent evolutions in bottle, and they are generally ranked as every bit as fine as the 1983s and 1988s, which were the two very top vintages on either side of the '85s, and at our tasting in San Francisco, the wines showed extremely well and clearly deserved their current high reputations.

I should mention that we had a bit of back luck at our tasting, as we hit corked bottles of the Pierre Barge Côte-Rôtie and the Dervieux-Thaize Côte-Rôtie “Fongent” cuvées. The mid-1980s was the start of the nadir of cork quality (happily now part of the distant past), so one has to expect a bit more TCA taint from this era than one sees today. Still, it hurt not to have notes on those two bottles in this report, as I had never tasted either wine previously and was very much looking forward to them. But, there were enough other brilliant wines at their peaks on this particular evening that losing a couple of bottles to TCA was a lot easier to take than it can be on other nights.

### **Cornas**

*I should take a moment to discuss how our 1985 examples of Cornas showed in San Francisco, as these wines as a group, were the most consistently exciting of the entire tasting. I remember very well the reputation of Cornas as the biggest and burliest wine of the northern Rhône, which is probably a misperception that continues on to this day. The reality at our tasting could not have been further from this reputation for the appellation, as this group of 1985s was the most elegant and refined set of wines in our lineup, and clearly one has to call into question the assumption that Cornas is the least refined appellation of the northern Rhône's “Big Three”. Part of the great showings of the 1985 Cornas wines at our event of course has to do with the generation of great traditionalists who still worked their vines in this era, as winemakers such as Noël Verset, Alain Voge and Marcel Juge were at their top of their games in 1985, with their wealth of experience still coupled with great holdings of old vines and they seized their opportunity in 1985 and made truly exceptional and utterly complete wines in this vintage. Even a producer such as Robert Michel, whose Cornas I have heretofore not had a lot of experience with, showed beautifully in 1985, and of course, the wines of Domaine Auguste Clape in this era were absolutely stellar. Cornas certainly starts out as the most stern structurally of the three appellations of Hermitage, Côte-Rôtie and Cornas, but with sufficient bottle age, it is hard not to argue that top flight Cornas is every bit as elegant in profile as Côte-Rôtie and Hermitage.*

### **1985 Cornas- Domaine Auguste Clape**

A few years ago I opened on my lone bottle of the beautiful 1991 Clape Cornas, which was a more refined wine than this very good bottle of 1985. I suppose it is not too surprising that the '85 Clape is still a bit on the adolescent side of its developmental arc, as it offers up a bouquet of black raspberries, medicinal syrah tones, hung game, pepper, stony soil tones, a touch



of walnut, fresh herbs and lovely spice elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and seemingly more evolved than on the nose, with a good core, still a bit of firm tannin to soften up and excellent length and grip on the complex and slightly rustic finish. This is a very, very good bottle of Cornas that still has many years of life ahead of it, and though today, it is not quite as complete as the 1991 Clape, it still has many years ago and may one day match that wine. 2013-2040. **93.**

**1985 Cornas- Domaine Marcel Juge**

Marcel Juge seems to have been the oft-overlooked star of Cornas during his long and very successful career, but despite his lack of fame, his wines have always been some of my favorites in the appellation and his 1985 is absolutely stellar. The bouquet here is simply stunning, soaring from the glass in a refined blend of baked red fruit, pepper, gamebird, a touch of chipotle, lovely soil tones and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and drinking at its apogee, with a fine core, resolved, melting tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long and classy finish. In my experience, the Juge wines of this era were always the most suave and elegant examples of Cornas out of the blocks, which may account for their being overlooked a bit, but this is a very strong testament to balance early on being the cornerstone of greatness down the road. Great juice. 2016-2035. **93.**

**1985 Cornas- Domaine Robert Michel**

Robert Michel is a producer in Cornas that I never really had access to during my merchant days and so I missed these wines. Based on how lovely his 1985 Cornas showed at our tasting, I am deeply regret not having been on top of his wines in this era. The 1985 offers up a fully mature, refined and smoky and complex bouquet of baked cherries and raspberries, smoked meats, celery seed, pepper and green olive. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully resolved, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and grip, melted tannins and impressive length and grip on the refined and *à point* finish. This still has decades of life ahead of it, but it is at its zenith and drinking with great style. 2016-2035. **91.**

**1985 Cornas- Domaine Noël Verset**

At our tasting in San Francisco, the 1985 Noël Verset was the youngest wine in our flight of Cornas, but it was still wide open and very, very enjoyable to drink. As I have noted before, this was my introduction to Monsieur Verset's wines back in the latter half of the 1980s and I drank the wine with some regularity through the early 1990s, as it was so approachable in the "puppy fat days" of its youth that it was awfully hard to resist. I had not drunk a bottle of the '85 since 2008 and was very happy to see it cruising along beautifully at our tasting, offering up a deep and vibrant bouquet of red and black raspberries, pepper, still a touch of medicinal syrah tones, black olives, game, plenty of smokiness and a superb base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impressively tangy for an '85, with a rock solid core, still a bit of backend tannin and great length and grip on the focused and very complex finish. The last time I drank this it was at a Verset vertical and the wine seemed perfectly resolved, but alongside of its communal peers from the vintage, it still seems like it is climbing and could yet improve! 2016-2035+. **95.**

**1985 Cornas "Vieilles Vignes"- Domaine Alain Voge**

The 1985 Cornas "Vieilles Vignes" from Alain Voge is one of the most beautiful wines to be found in the entire vintage in the northern Rhône, and this wine deserves to be spoken of in the same reverential tones as are reserved for Verset, Gentaz, Chave and Jamet in '85. The bouquet is stunningly transparent and defined by its underlying *terroir* in 1985, soaring from the glass in a very complex and elegant blend of raspberries, black olives, smoked meats, a touch of



cocoa powder, just a bit of pepper and glorious soil complexities. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and transparent like a great Burgundy, with perfect balance, a great core of fruit, still just a bit of backend tannin and outstanding grip and focus on the very long, pure and magical finish. This is a great, elegant and perfectly resolved bottle of Cornas at its peak. 2016-2045. **95.**

### ***Hermitage***

#### **1985 Hermitage- Domaine Jean-Louis Chave**

The 1985 vintage of Chave Hermitage is very, very good, but one has to recall that back in this era, Gérard Chave bottled a couple of different cuvées of his Hermitage, as certain importers received different blends of casks, depending on what they had traditionally purchased at the estate. So there is some bottle variation to be found in all of the Chave vintages from this era, but with all of the wines excellent in quality- albeit slightly different in personality. This most recent bottle was very pretty, offering up a vibrant and fully mature blend of raspberries, pepper, stony soil tones, a bit of smoked meats, lovely spice notes and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is fairly high acid in profile for the '85 vintage, with its full-bodied format displaying a fine core, impressive transparency, still a fair bit of tannin and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This particular bottle is quite red fruity in personality and not quite at the same level of the very best examples of '85 Chave that I have tasted, but it is still a beautifully made wine. Stylistically, it does not show the same velvety generosity that one finds in vintages such as 1991 of this bottling, but it delivers an admirable expression of its underlying *terroir*, lovely fruit tones and plenty of complexity in a slightly more rigid structure. 2014-2040. **93.**

### ***Côte-Rôtie***

#### **1985 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Bernard Burgaud**

It has always been my impression that the 1985 vintage was Bernard Burgaud's greatest year, as some changes took place here in the later vintages of the 1980s and early 1990s that seemed to conspire against the wines reaching the magical peak of the 1985. I sold a fair bit of this wine in my early merchant days and knew the wine very well over the first decade of its life in the market, but had not seen a bottle in many, many years prior to our San Francisco tasting in August. The wine has aged very gracefully and offers up a complex bouquet of cassis, black cherries, leather, woodsmoke, a bit of blood, lovely soil tones and hung game. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite solid at the core, with fine balance and grip, still a touch of backend tannin and very good length on the finish. This does not quite possess the breed at maturity of wines like the Jamet of Champet Côte Brune, but it is a delightful drink and still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2016-2040. **93.**

#### **1985 Côte-Rôtie "Côte Brune"- Domaine Émile Champet**

The 1985 Côte Brune bottling from Émile Champet should probably be labeled as *Côte de Brune*, as this is not entirely from the vineyard of this name, but is actually eighty percent from the equally fine La Viallière in 1985. This was the first time I had ever had the pleasure to taste the 1985 and the wine is stunning, offering up a pure and utterly classic aromatic constellation of raspberry, pepper, gamebird, beautifully complex soil tones, a touch of celery seed and a very smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and beautifully transparent in personality, with a fine core, dissipating tannins and a very long, pure and tangy finish. This wine was pretty hunkered down when we first opened it, but thirty minutes

in decanter worked its magic and the wine was absolutely singing by the time it was served! 2016-2040. **95.**

#### **1985 Côte-Rôtie “la Mouline”- Domaine Guigal**

I can vividly recall just how beautiful the 1985 La Mouline was from Marcel Guigal back in the decade of the 1990s, when there were few other wines from the vintage that could match its sheer beauty and extravagant personality. However, at age thirty-one, the new oak in this wine is starting to poke out a bit more than was the case back in its prime, and the wine is not quite the seamless beauty it was of yesteryear. It is still a lovely bottle, but it has come back to the pack a bit, offering up a deep and complex nose of black raspberries, cassis, grilled meats, nutskin, coffee, a lovely base of soil and plenty of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still in its plateau of maturity, with melted tannins and a long, classy finish. I would be happy to drink this wine anytime, but I remember when it was just a bit closer to perfection than it is today. 2016-2035. **94.**



#### **1985 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gentaz-Dervieux**

I had only previously tasted the 1985 from Marius Gentaz in vertical tastings from this Côte-Rôtie master, so it was nice to try a bottle alongside some of its peers from the vintage. The bouquet shows superb depth and complexity, as well as still retaining a nice touch of its stems in its aromatic constellation of cassis, roasted venison, pepper, dark chocolate, notably stony soil tones, charred wood and a nice touch of spices (from the whole clusters) in the upper register. On

the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still a tad chewy on the backend, with a fine core of fruit, impeccable focus and grip and a very long, vibrant and utterly classical finish. This is an outstanding wine that is now into its apogee, but has years and years of life still ahead of it. With the exception of one utterly profound bottle of the '85 Gentaz back in 2013, it has always been my impression that Monsieur Gentaz realized even greater success in this decade in the vintages of 1982, 1983 and 1988, and nothing about this most recent bottle of 1985 dissuades me from that impression. 2016-2035. **94.**

#### **1985 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Joseph Jamet**

Joseph Jamet began vinifying his Côte-Rôtie in 1950, but did not bottle his first vintage until 1976, with the *négociants* the beneficiaries of his first quarter century of production. He retired in 1991, passing on the reins of the family domaine to his two sons, Jean-Paul and Jean-Luc. His 1985 bottling is absolutely magical and one of the absolute stars of the vintage, soaring from the glass in a stunning blend of black raspberries, black cherries, beautiful smoky tones, a very complex base of soil, hung game, a touch of pepper and a topnote of raw cocoa. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and truly laser-like in its focus, with a plush core of fruit, great soil drive, melted tannins and exceptional length and grip on the complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This easily has another quarter century of life ahead of it, but it is *à point* and drinking gloriously today. 2016-2040. **96.**

#### **1985 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Robert Jasmin**

The 1985 Côte-Rôtie from Robert Jasmin is a fine example of the vintage, with his inclusion of stems here having given the wine a nice, “brambly” personality as it enters its fourth decade in bottle. The bouquet is deep, vibrant and complex, offering up notes of raspberries, green olive, lovely spice tones, excellent minerality, nutskin, pepper and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very transparent in personality, with a fine core, still some chewy tannins on the backend and excellent length and grip on the tangy finish. This did not show as elegantly as some of the other '85 Côte-Rôties, but the wine is really good and is drinking well. 2016-2035. **92.**

#### **1985 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- Domaine René Rostaing**

The 1985 Côte Blonde bottling from Monsieur Rostaing is outstanding, with this particular bottle a bit more black fruity in personality than the one I reported on two years ago. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of black cherries, pepper, gamebird, nutskin, complex, autumnal soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied., complex and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with melting tannins, bright acids and impressive length and focus on the very well-balanced finish. Another beautiful wine. 2016-2040. **94.**

#### **1985 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- Domaine René Rostaing**

The 1985 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne” from René Rostaing is also an excellent wine at its apogee, with this bottle showing ever better than the last one that I had a couple of years ago! The bouquet is pure and refined, offering up scents of red and black raspberries, celery seed, coffee, smoked meats and a seriously complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really fine-tuned in its balance, with a pure core of fruit, lovely soil inflection and still a bit of backend tannin perking up the long and complex finish. A superb bottle that still has decades of life ahead of it. 2016-2050. **94.**

## THE BI-ANNUAL CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING WINE INDEX AUTUMN 2016



As has been my custom for many years now, the Champagne feature of Issue 65 is organized first by type of Wine. First Appears a couple of still pinot noir bottlings from Champagne, followed by Sparkling Wines from other regions. The Champagne producers are presented in this order: **Sec** and **Demi-Sec** wines listed first, **Extra Brut** and **Brut Nature** second, **Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs** in the third section, **Non-Vintage Brut** and **Blanc de Noirs** in the fourth, **Non-Vintage Brut** and **Extra Brut Rosé** in the fifth, **Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs** in the sixth section, **Vintage-Dated Brut** and **Extra Brut** in the seventh and **Vintage-Date Rosé** in the eighth section. Within each non-vintage section, the wines are listed alphabetically. Within the groups of Vintage-Dated wines, they are grouped first by vintage, from youngest to oldest, and then alphabetically by producer within each vintage subsection. There are a lot of wines in this report, but with the index below and an understanding of the organization of the article, it should be fairly easy to find any specific wine that you may be looking for a note on in this feature.

***Alphabetical List of Champagne and Sparkling Wines Tasted in This Feature:***

**Agrapart-** Extra Brut NV, Brut Nature Blanc de Blancs NV, “Les 7 Crus” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut (Lot May 2013),

**L. Aubry Fils-** 1996 “Sable” Brut Rosé- Nicolas François Aubry;

**Ayala-** Brut Nature NV; “Brut Majeur” NV, Rosé Majeur” Brut NV, “Rosé No. 8” Brut NV, 2007 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime, 2005 “Cuvée Perle d’Ayala” Grand Cru Brut Millésime;

**Barnaut-** “Grande Réserve” Grand Cru Brut NV, “Authentique” Brut Rosé NV;

**Bergère-** Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV;

**Bertha-** Brut Nature Reserva (Cava- Penedès),

**Bollinger-** “Spéciale Cuvée” Brut NV, Brut Rosé NV, 2005 “La Grande Année” Brut Millésime, 2002 “R. D.” Brut Millésime, 1999 “R. D.” Brut Millésime Served From Magnum, 1996 “Grande Année” Brut Millésime, 2005 “La Grande Année” Brut Rosé Millésime;

**Francis Boulard-** Extra Brut “Grande Montagne” Gr. Cru NV, “Les Murgiers” Extra Brut NV (Disg: 9/15), “Les Murgiers” Brut Nature NV (Disg: 11/14);

**Ulysse Collin-** “Les Perrières” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut, “Les Maillons” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut;

**Champagne Corbon-** 2002 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime;

**Bruno Dangin-** “Confrérie” Crémant de Bourgogne Brut NV, 2014 “Prestige de Narcès” Crémant de Bourgogne Brut;

**Jacques Defrance-** “Brut Exception” NV, “Brut Prestige” NV, Brut Rosé NV,

**Dehours et Fils-** “Grande Réserve” Brut NV;

**Demièr-Ansiot-** Blanc de Blancs Brut NV, 2010 “Neyrot” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature;

**José Dhondt-** Blanc de Blancs Brut NV, Brut Rosé NV, 2010 “Mes Vieilles Vignes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime, 2009 “Mes Vieilles Vignes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime,

**Drappier-** 1996 “Grande Sèndrée” Brut Millésime, 2008 “Grande Sèndrée” Brut Rosé Millésime;

**Alexandre Filaine-** 2007 “Sensuum Vertigo” Brut Millésime;

**Fumey-Tassin-** 2008 “Cuvée de Réserve” Brut Millésime;

**Pierre Gerbais-** “Grains de Celles” Extra Brut NV, “l’Audace” Brut Nature NV, “l’Originale” Extra Brut NV, “Réserve” Brut NV, Brut Rosé NV;

**Pierre Gimmonet Fils-** 1996 “Cuvée Gastronom” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime;

**Henri Giraud-** “Esprit de Giraud” Brut NV, “Fût de Chêne MV” Grand Cru Brut NV, “Hommage à François Hémar” Grand Cru Brut NV, “Code Noir” Grand Cru Blanc de Noirs Brut NV, “Fût de Chêne MV” Rosé Grand Cru Brut NV;

**Olivier Horiot-** 2009 Rosé des Riceys “en Valingrain” Pinot Noir, “Métisse Noirs et Blancs” Extra Brut NV,

**Huré Frères-** “Mémoire” Extra Brut NV, “4 Elements” Premier Cru Extra Brut, “Invitation” Brut NV, “Insouciance” Brut Rosé NV, 2008 “Instantanée” Extra Brut Millésime;

**Jacquesson-** “Cuvée No. 739” Extra Brut NV, 1996 “Avize” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime, 1985 Brut Millésime;

**Janisson Baradon et Fils-** “Brut Selection” NV;

**Lanson-** 1996 “Collection” Brut Millésime Magnum

**Jacques Lassaigne-** “le Vigne de Montgueux” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV;





**Georges Laval-** “Cumières” Brut Nature NV, “Cumières” Brut NV Magnum (Disg: Oct. 2013), 2006 “Les Chênes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature, 2009 “Les Hautes Chèvres” Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature;

**Château de Lavernette-** “Granit” Brut Nature NV (Mâcon);

**David Léclapart-** “l’Artiste” Blanc de Blancs Pas Dosé NV L.V10;

**Marie-Noëlle Ledru-** 2009 “Cuvée Goulte” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut, 2002 Extra Brut Millésime;

**Lilbert-Fils-** Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV, 2010 Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut Millésime;

**Gérard Lorient-** “Brut Tradition” NV, “Brut Sélection” NV, Brut Rosé NV;

**Marguet Père et Fils-** “Shaman 12” Grand Cru Extra Brut Rosé NV;

**Eudald Massana Noya-** “Reserva” Brut Nature Cava NV, “Brut Familia” Cava NV;

**Moët et Chandon-** 1996 Dom Pérignon Brut, 1996 Dom Pérignon “Oenothèque” Brut, 1985 Dom Pérignon Brut;

**Pierre Moncuit-** 1996 “Cuvée Millésimé” Blanc de Blancs Brut;

**Jean-Luc Mouillard-** Crémant du Jura;

**Colet Navazos-** 2009 Extra Brut Penedès Sparkling Wine;

**Pierre Paillard-** 2008 Coteaux Champenois Bouzy Rouge,

**Domaine Pfister-** 2012 Crémant du Jura “Blanc de Blancs”;

**Philipponnat-** “Non-Dosé” Royal Réserve Brut Nature NV;

**Pierre Peters-** 1996 “Cuvée Spéciale” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime;  
**Piper-Heidsieck-** 2002 “Rare” Brut Millésime, 2007 “Rare” Brut Rosé Millésime;  
**Ployez-Jacquemart-** 2008 Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut, 2000 “Liesse d’Harbonville” Brut Millésime;  
**The Rare Wine Company-** “le Mesnil” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV;  
**Louis Roederer-** “Brut Premier” NV, 2009 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 2009 Brut Nature, 2009 Brut Millésime, 2009 Cristal, 2010 Brut Rosé Millésime;  
**Pol Roger-** “Réserve” Brut NV, 2008 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime, 2006 Brut Millésime, 2004 “Cuvée Winston Churchill” Brut Millésime, 2002 Brut Millésime, 1995 “Cuvée Winston Churchill” Brut Millésime, 2008 Brut Rosé;  
**Camille Savès-** “le Mont des Tours” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV, “Carte Blanche” Premier Cru Brut NV, “les Loges” Blanc de Noirs Brut NV, Grand Cru Brut Rosé NV; 2008 Grand Cru Brut Millésime, 2008 “Anaïs Jolicoeur” Grand Cru Brut Millésime, 2007 Grand Cru Brut Millésime;  
**Salon-** 1996 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime;  
**Jean-Marc Sélèque-** “le Quintette” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV, “les Solistes” Extra Brut NV, “Solessence” Brut NV, “Solessence” Brut Rosé NV, “les Solistes” Extra Brut Rosé NV, 2010 “Partition” Extra Brut;  
**Taittinger-** “Nocturne” Sec NV, “Nocturne” Sec Rosé NV, “Brut Réserve” NV, “la Française” Brut NV, “Préste Rosé” Brut NV, 2006 Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs, 1996 Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs, 1993 Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs, 1982 Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs, 2006 Comtes de Champagne Brut Rosé, 2000 Comtes de Champagne Brut Rosé;  
**Champagne Tarlant** “Zero” Brut Nature NV, “Cuvée Louis” Brut Nature NV, “Zero” Brut Nature Rosé NV, 2003 “La Matinale” Brut Nature Millésime;  
**Céline et Laurent Tripoz-** 2013 Crémant de Bourgogne Brut Nature (Mâcon);  
**Vazart-Coquart-** Blanc de Blancs “Réserve” Brut NV, Brut Rosé NV, 2008 “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime, 2006 “Grand Bouquet” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime Magnum, 2004 “Grand Bouquet” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime Jeroboam



THE BI-ANNUAL CHAMPAGNE  
AND SPARKLING WINE REVIEW AUTUMN 2016



I always look forward to putting together my bi-annual Champagne reports, as this remains one of France's most dynamic viticultural regions at the present time and there are always plenty of new and interesting things emerging from these rolling hillside vineyards. Having taken the opportunity to go to Campania this spring during the time slot I usually reserve for an extended visit to Champagne, I have been even more excited to taste through current releases and discover new bottlings and cuvées that I might have already heard about if I had spent my customary two weeks here in the spring. Amongst the new bottlings to cross my path for this article were the new, single vineyard bottlings from Champagne Camille Savès in Bouzy, including a Blanc de Blancs bottling from the vineyard of le Mont des Tours in the village, and a Blanc de Noirs bottling from the *lieu à dit* of les Loges (also located in Bouzy). Both wines are finished as Extra Bruts and they were excellent. This autumn also was the debut for a new bottling of Piper-Heidsieck Rare Rosé, which had never before been produced by this *Grande Marque*, and I was very pleased to have lunch with the house's Managing Director, Régis Camus, in early October and sample the new, stellar 2007 Rare Rosé. It is a great new addition to the firmament of *Têtes de Cuvées* and will delight even the most spoiled and sophisticated of Champagne palates! There were also a few new (to me) grower Champagne producers who I had

the pleasure to taste in preparation for this report whose wines I found absolutely superb, and including Francis Boulard in the Côte de Bars and Jacques Defrance in the village of Les Riceys (also in the Aube). This article also saw the first bottles of the wines of Henri Giraud in Aÿ to cross my desk in many years and I was very happy to see the wines again represented in the New York market, with the most recent releases as fine as anything I have ever previously tasted from this excellent estate!

However, the absolute highlight tasting for this report was a broad look at the 1996 vintage in Champagne at age twenty, organized by New York collector Jayson Cohen, who kindly included me in his guest list for his horizontal tasting in early August. All of us in attendance dipped into our cellars to bring bottles from the vintage, so that we could put together a serious cross-section of 1996s for examination. We had a couple of attendees have to cancel at the last minute and this cut into the lineup a little bit (their absence at the table was felt every bit as keenly as their missing cuvées!), as a few of the major bottlings from '96 were coming out of their cellars, but as we all had brought bottles, the lineup remained excellent and it was one of the tasting highlights of the year. It was interesting to take a look at the 1996s at this point in their evolutions, as the vintage was initially very highly-touted for its rare combination of high sugar levels and even higher acidity levels, and early appraisals of the vintage were for assured future greatness with sufficient bottle age. About five years out from the release of the 1996s, there was some revisionist thinking in certain circles, with people starting to question whether wines with this much acidity would ever have enough fruit to balance the acids long-term and age gracefully. Indeed, we did find that some 1996 wines which had not aged as harmoniously as hoped for and proved that some of this concern was not unwarranted, with the wines that were not singing showing their acids still plenty racy, but with their fruit tones often getting on towards the far side of maturity and the overall structures starting to look fragile and suspect for any further holding. However, other 1996s were fresh and perfectly sound structurally and at a beautiful moment for drinking, but also with no worries about further long-term cellaring. In retrospect, it seems that the very best wines of 1996 are more than worthy of the early hype that surrounded the vintage, but some of the less successful producers in '96 did not craft wines for the long haul and the concerns that started to crop up around the vintage a decade ago or so certainly seemed merited for those particular wines.

### ***Vin Rouge***

#### **2009 Rosé des Riceys “en Valingrain”- Olivier Horiot**

The 2009 Rosé des Riceys “en Valingrain” from Olivier Horiot is a light-colored pinot noir (or a dark rosé) that is absolutely loaded with personality. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a youthful blend of cherries, wild strawberries, spiced meats, chalky soil tones, bonfires and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and very intensely flavored, with tangy acids, outstanding focus and balance and a very long, classy finish. This packs amazing depth of flavor for its light color and gentle weight, and I have to imagine that it will age magnificently well. A completely new wine to me that I intend to start following every year! 2016-2035+. 92+.

#### **2008 Coteaux Champenois Bouzy Rouge- Pierre Paillard**

The 2008 Coteaux Champenois Bouzy Rouge from Pierre Paillard is really a lovely bottle of pinot noir. This bottle has been sitting in my cellar for a year or so, waiting for another pinot from Champagne to keep it company in an article, and the extra year's worth of bottle age has

been well rewarded. The bouquet is pure and classy, offering up scents of cherries, a touch of cranberry, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and vibrant, with a good core, lovely soil transparency, just a touch of tannin and impressive backend energy and bounce on the well-balanced, complex and tangy finish. This is starting to blossom nicely, but will also clearly age very gracefully and may well be even better with a bit more bottle age! 2016-2035. **89+**.

### ***Sparkling Wines***

#### **Bertha Brut Nature Reserva (Cava- Penedès)**

**Disgorged August 2015**

The new release of Brut Nature Reserva from Bertha is from the base year of 2013 and is comprised of a classic blend of Macabeu, Xarel-lo and Parellada. The wine was aged anywhere from fifteen months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is a fine and quite complex blend of tart orange, salty soil tones, gentle smokiness, fresh almond and a touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with brisk acids, frothy *mousse* and good mineral drive on the long and focused finish. This is a very good example, with very good mid-palate depth. 2016-2025. **89**.

#### **Bruno Danguin “Confrérie” Crémant de Bourgogne Brut NV**

Bruno Danguin’s domaine lies about a kilometer outside of the appellation boundaries for Champagne, so with a bit better luck, these could have been Aube Champagne bottlings, rather than Crémant de Bourgogne! He is a good friend of the Aube’s Barbichon family, who suggested his wines to the folks at Transatlantic Bubbles. The Confrérie bottling is a Blanc de Noirs made entirely from pinot noir, with the current release from the base year of 2012. The farming here is certified organic, the wine is fermented with native yeasts and ages three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. It was finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. The wine is excellent, offering up a fine nose of peach, flinty minerality, lime peel and a musky floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a lovely core, frothy *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Fine juice and an excellent value. 2016-2025+. **89**.

#### **Château de Lavernette “Granit” Brut Nature NV (Mâcon)**

Château de Lavernette “Granit” Brut Nature is produced from a parcel of gamay vines near the estate, but is finished without any skin contact and is a Blanc de Noirs, rather than a Rosé. The wine is from the base year of 2014 and was disgorged in May of 2016. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of tart pear, bread fruit, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and really beautifully balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, lovely soil signature and impressive length and grip on the very elegant finish. This is light on its feet and quite serious! 2016-2030. **90+**.

#### **Eudald Massana Noya “Reserva” Brut Nature Cava NV (Penedès)**

The Brut Nature Reserva from Eudald Massana Noya has quite a different *cépages* than the Brut Familia (see below), as this wine is composed of a blend of forty-nine percent Macabeu, twenty-one percent Xarel-lo, eighteen percent Parellada and twelve percent Chardonnay, with all of the grapes farmed organically. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet of bread fruit, sea salts, warm bread, a fine base of minerality, dried flowers and a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with fine focus and grip, frothy *mousse*, very good balance and a long, vibrant finish. This is classic, top notch Cava, with a rock solid core and plenty of personality. 2016-2030. **90**.

**Eudald Massana Noya “Brut Familia” Cava NV (Penedès)**

The “Brut Familia” from Eudald Massana Noya is composed of a blend of sixty percent Macabeu, thirty percent Xarel-lo and ten percent Parellada. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of lime, sea salts, wild fennel, stony minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core of fruit, lovely underlying minerality, frothy *mousse* and lovely bounce on the focused and well-balanced finish. The *dosage* here seems just a whisper generous in comparison to the Brut Nature, but this is a very well-made bottle. 2016-2025. **88.**

**Crémant du Jura- Jean-Luc Mouillard**

The Crémant du Jura- Jean-Luc Mouillard is comprised entirely of chardonnay and is fermented in the bottle, with the wine going through full malo and spending a minimum of twelve months aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The current release offers up a stylish nose of pear, apple, chalky minerality and fresh-baked bread. On the palate the wine is young, bright and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, pinpoint bubbles, snappy acids and lovely backend minerality on the long and nascently complex finish. This is on the young side and could do with a bit of bottle age to allow the acids to soften a bit, but there is depth and nice balance here and I suspect with a couple of years in the cellar, this will approach the quality of many non-vintage Brut Champagnes. 2017-2025. **88.**

**2014 Bruno Danguin “Prestige de Narcès” Crémant de Bourgogne Brut NV**

The Prestige de Narcès bottling from Bruno Danguin is another outstanding wine, with the *vins clairs* for this bottling entirely barrel-fermented. This is Monsieur Danguin’s top wine and it too is a Blanc de Noirs made up entirely of pinot noir. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter, with all of the fruit again organically farmed and the wine fermented with native yeasts. The bouquet is deep and youthfully complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, lime zest, a nice touch of nuttiness, chalky minerality and just a whisper of butter oak somewhere in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very precise in its focus, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse* and really impressive length and grip on the snappy and youthful finish. This is quite tasty today, but will be even better after a year or two in the cellar. Another outstanding value! 2016-2030. **90+.**

**2013 Céline et Laurent Tripoz Crémant de Bourgogne Brut Nature (Mâcon)**

The 2013 Crémant de Bourgogne from the Tripoz family is one hundred percent chardonnay and absolutely lovely. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy blend of peach, a touch of wild strawberry, lovely, Mâcon soil tones and a topnote of wheat toast. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and very well-balanced, with pinpoint bubbles, fine focus and grip and impressive length on the finish. A lovely bottle. 2016-2020. **90.**

**2012 Crémant du Jura “Blanc de Blancs”- Domaine Pfister**

The 2012 Crémant du Jura “Blanc de Blancs” from Domaine Pfister is composed of a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot blanc. The wine was aged twenty-nine months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and offers up a lovely nose of apple, white peach, spring flowers, a touch of brioche and a stylish base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with slightly large bubbles, but a good core, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long finish. This is not overly complex, but it is very well-made and very easy to drink. 2016-2025. **87.**

### **2009 Colet Navazos Extra Brut Penedès Sparkling Wine**

**Disgorged October 2012**

The 2009 Colet Navazos Extra Brut is primarily Xarel-lo and was aged for thirty months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine is quite refined on both the nose and palate, offering up a fine bouquet of tangerine, lemon peel, a touch of nuttiness and a fine base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with frothy *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, vibrant and classy finish. A very high class Cava that is aging beautifully and still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2016-2025. **91.**



### ***Sec and Demi-Sec***

#### **Taittinger “Nocturne” Sec NV (Reims)**

The current release of Taittinger’s “Nocturne” Sec is composed of the same blend as the Brut Réserve- forty percent chardonnay, thirty-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent pinot meunier, was aged fully four years *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of 17.5 grams per liter. The wine offers up a lovely nose of nectarine, bread dough, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and just a whisper of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, a lovely girdle of acidity to carry the additional *dosage* and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. As has been the case for several years, this is a very, very well-made bottle of sweeter-styled Champagne. I should mention that I really miss the gorgeous purple label that this cuvée used to sport, as the new package is primarily navy blue and not quite as festive. 2016-2025+. **90.**

### **Taittinger “Nocturne” Sec Rosé NV (Reims)**

The Taittinger “Nocturne” Sec Rosé that is currently in the market has a touch more pinot noir in the blend than the regular Nocturne bottling, with forty percent of the blend pinot noir and only twenty percent pinot meunier. It was aged a touch shorter on its fine lees than the regular bottling, but still spent fully three years *sur latte* and was finished with the same *dosage* of 17.5 grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of red berries, cherries, gentle spice tones, rose petals, soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, complex and full-bodied, with a fine cut and grip, lovely mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse* and very good length on the well-balanced finish. Like the above, the acids are plenty sufficient to carry the higher *dosage* and the wine is quite classy on the backend. 2016-2025+. **90.**

### ***Extra Brut and Brut Nature Blanc de Blancs NV***

#### **Agrapart “Les 7 Crus” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut (Lot May 2013) Disgorged Oct. 2015**

It had been a few years since I last tasted a bottle of Agrapart’s lovely “Les 7 Crus” cuvée. The wine is really lovely, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of apple, tart pear, chalky minerality, citrus zest and fresh-baked bread. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and a very long, zesty and perfectly balanced finish. This is one lower *dosage* bottling that is drinking with style and grace in its youth. 2016-2030. **92.**

#### **Ulysse Collin “Les Perrières” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut (Congy) Disg: February 2016**

The Ulysse Collin Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut all hails from the single parcel of Les Perrières, which is planted with thirty-five year-old vines. Like all of Olivier’s Collin’s wines these days, the *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented and aged for an extended period in older casks prior to bottling, after which the wine spends two to three years aging *sur latte*. The new release of Les Perrières, which is marked on the back label as Lot 12 (meaning it hails from the base year of 2012) offers up a lovely bouquet that shows just a touch of buttery oak influence in its blend of pear, delicious apple, pastry cream, a fine base of soil, buttery oak and a distinctly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and quite dry, with lovely *mousse*, a fine core and lovely backend mineral drive on the long, balanced and nascently complex finish. The *dosage* on this bottling is between one and two grams and the balance is impeccable, making the wine eminently accessible right out of the blocks. Fine juice, where the gentle oak influence is very nicely done. 2016-2030. **92.**

#### **Jacques Lassaigne “le Vigne de Montgueux” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Montgueux)**

The current release of the Jacques Lassaigne “le Vigne de Montgueux” Blanc de Blancs is a really lovely bottle that perfectly captures the flinty minerality of the Aube. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of pear, fresh almond, complex, flinty minerality, citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a very long, vibrant finish. For a non-*dosé* bottling, this really shows lovely balance in its youth. 2016-2030. **92.**

#### **David Léclapart “l’Artiste” Blanc de Blancs Pas Dosé NV L.V10 (Trépail)**

I last tasted this wine in the spring of 2016, but I assume that this most recent shipment is a later disgorgement date, though this does not appear on the back label. In any case, this is again the superb Blanc de Blancs from Monsieur Léclapart from the base year of 2010, which I mentioned in my last note on the wine, sees half of the *vins clairs* for this bottling barrel-fermented and the other half in enameled stainless steel tanks. The wine goes through a full malolactic fermentation and received no *dosage*. The bouquet remains outstanding, offering up a



nascently complex constellation of apple, pear, fresh almond, chalky minerality, spring flowers and *crème patissière*. On the palate this release seems just a touch tighter than the last shipment, but still full-bodied, focused and impeccably well-balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a very long, brisk and bone-dry finish. Non-*dosage* Blanc de Blancs can be pretty tensile juice on the palate, but this wine is seamlessly balanced and very tasty, albeit really crafted for those who are already in love with Brut Nature or minimal *dosage* bubbly and may be a bit stern for those who normally drink Brut bottlings. 2016-2035. **93.**

**Jean-Marc Sélèque “le Quintette” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Pierry) Disg: Jan. 2016**

Jean-Marc Sélèque’s “le Quintette” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut is produced from five distinct parcels of chardonnay owned by the domaine, with an eye towards building up complexity from variations of *terroir*. Fifty percent of the *vins clairs* are fermented in cask, fifty percent in stainless steel and the wine was finished off with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. The current release is base year 2012 and offers up a superb bouquet of pear, white peach, fresh almond, brioche, chalky soil nuances and a gentle smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very pure, with a rock solid core, excellent mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a very long, exquisitely balanced and complex finish. This spent around three years aging *sur latte*, and within this time frame, it is hard to get this kind of seamless integration on the palate with only two grams per liter of *dosage*, unless the grapes were admirably ripe to begin with. A superb bottle. 2016-2035. **92.**

***Extra Brut and Brut Nature NV***

**Ayala Brut Nature NV (Aÿ)**

**Disgorged September 2014**

This is the same release of Ayala Brut Nature non-vintage that I reviewed a year ago, but the additional year in bottle has really allowed the wine to blossom beautifully and it is showing even better than it did last summer. As readers may recall, the *cépages* here is forty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot noir and twenty percent pinot meunier and the wine received no *dosage* whatsoever. Today, the bouquet is pure and vibrant, offering up scents of apple, white peach, beautifully complex soil tones, brioche, dried flowers and discreet smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. As this wine is non-*dosé*, it really is far better at the table than as an *aperitif*, but the wine has opened up superbly with another year in bottle and is drinking impressively well. 2016-2030. **91.**

**Francis Boulard Extra Brut “Grande Montagne” Gr. Cru NV (Cauroy-lès-Hermonville)**

The current release of non-vintage “Grande Montagne” Extra Brut from Francis Boulard is from the base year of 2010, with thirty percent of the blend made up of reserve wines from the previous two years. The wine was disgorged in June of 2013 and is composed of a blend of ninety percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* having been barrel-fermented in older casks. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter and offers up a lovely nose of white peach, *patissière*, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and a very faint wisp of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core, pinpoint bubbles and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. This wine is still quite zesty, but three years of additional bottle age since disgorgement have really allowed the wine to blossom and it is drinking with distinction today. 2016-2030. **91+.**

**Francis Boulard “Les Murgiers” Extra Brut NV (Cauroy-lès-Hermonville) Disg: Sept. 2015**

The new release of Francis Boulard’s “Les Murgiers” Extra Brut is composed entirely of pinot meunier and hails from the base year of 2012, with thirty percent of the blend made up of



reserve wines from the previous two vintages. It was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter and offers up a pure and vibrant nose of white peach, beautiful meunier floral tones, *patissière*, chalky soil tones and just a wisp of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with frothy *mousse*, a lovely core, fine focus and grip and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This is a beautiful bottle of non-vintage bubbly, with the structure to age well, but with so much immediate appeal that it is going to be hard to keep one's hands off of in the cellar! Lovely juice. 2016-2030+. **92.**

**Francis Boulard “Les Murgiers” Brut Nature NV (Cauroy-lès-Hermonville) Disg: 11/14**

The new release of Francis Boulard's “Les Murgiers” Brut Nature is a blend of seventy percent pinot meunier and thirty percent pinot noir. The base year for this bottling is 2007 and the wine was aged six and a half years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The *vins clairs* were all barrel-fermented in older wood and went through full malo. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of tangerine, white peach, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil tones and discreet nuttiness as a topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, beautifully-integrated acids, elegant *mousse* and lovely soil signature on the long and complex finish. Without any *dosage*, the wine probably needed its extended period on the lees to harmonize seamlessly, which has now done and the wine is drinking splendidly. Fine, fine Brut Nature! 2016-2025. **92.**

**Ulysse Collin “Les Maillons” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut (Congy) Disg: February 2016**

The les Maillons bottling is Olivier's Collin's pinot noir-based wine, with the family's parcel in this vineyard is planted with forty-plus year-old vines. The base year for this bottling is 2012 (identified by a Lot 12 designation on the back label) and since 2007, this bottling has also included a percentage of reserve wines. The *vins clairs* receive an extended *elevage* and are aged at least a year in old Burgundy casks prior to bottling, with the wine finished off with a very low *dosage* of one to two grams. The bouquet on the current release of les Maillons offers up a deep and vinous blend of peach, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil, an exotic hint of crushed violet and a discreet touch of cask influence that seems to reflect gently-browned butter. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a superb core, delicate *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a very long, classy finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Blanc de Noirs that handles its low *dosage* admirably well, with the wine ready to drink out of the blocks, but built also to age long and gracefully. Impressive juice. 2016-2030+. **92+.**

**Pierre Gerbais “Grains de Celles” Extra Brut NV (Celles sur Ource)**

The Grains de Celles Extra Brut bottling is the exact same base wine as the non-vintage Brut from the Gerbais family, but with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The *cépages* is fifty percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent each of chardonnay and pinot blanc and the current release is base year 2012. The nose is quite lovely, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, white peach, bread dough and stony minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and snappy, with frothy *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, minerally finish that closes with a youthful note of quinine. This is bone dry, but very nicely balanced. 2016-2025+. **90.**

**Pierre Gerbais “l’Audace” Brut Nature NV (Celles sur Ource) Disgorged March 2016**

The cuvée l’Audace from Pierre Gerbais is from the base year of 2011. The *vins clairs* go through full malo and are fermented and raised in stainless steel, with no SO2 added during the *elevage* or bottling. The wine is made entirely from pinot noir and offers up a superb bouquet of apple, white peach, *patissière*, plenty of smokiness and a complex base of Aube soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and vibrant, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the complex and focused finish. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2030. **92+.**



**Pierre Gerbais “l’Originale” Extra Brut NV (Celles sur Ource) Disgorged March 2016**

The current release of this Pinot Blanc only cuvée is base year 2011 and was finished off with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. This is a lovely bottle, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of peach, pear, spring flowers, chalky minerality and bread dough. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and tightly-knit, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and good, but not great length on the focused and well-balanced finish. Tasted after the l’Audace cuvée, this is more youthfully structured and not quite as long on the finish, but equally complex and classy. I would give it a couple of years in the cellar to soften up on the palate. 2018-2030. **91.**

**Olivier Horiot “Métisse Noirs et Blancs” Extra Brut NV (les Riceys) Disg: October 2015**

The Olivier Horiot “Métisse Noirs et Blancs” is a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent pinot blanc, with the reserve wines in the blend from a solera that Olivier Horiot started a few years after taking over the family’s estate in the southernmost Aube from his father in 1999. Interestingly, Olivier’s real passion is making still pinot noir. The new release of Métisse is from the base year of 2013, spent seven months aging in older cask prior to bottling and was finished off with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and youthful, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, peach, chalky minerality, a touch of *patissière*, fresh almond and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full and still youthfully snappy, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, very good focus and grip and a long, youthful finish. This was only aged eighteen months *sur latte* and could use a bit of bottle age to blossom, but it is a very well-made wine and will be very tasty once it has opened up a bit more. 2017-2027+. **90.**

**Huré Frères “Mémoire” Extra Brut NV (Ludes)****Disgorged March 2016**

The Mémoire bottling from Huré Frères is comprised entirely of reserve wines from their solera which they started in 1982, from which the family draws off a small percentage each year to age for twelve months in older *foudres* prior to bottling. The *dosage* here is three grams per liter and the blend is forty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier and ten percent chardonnay. The current release is simply outstanding, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of apple, peach, fresh-baked bread, a touch of caraway seed, smoky overtones and a bit of nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and focused, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a beautiful synthesis of mature flavors and youthful, zesty structure. This is drinking with great style out of the blocks and will also age quite nicely. High class juice. 2016-2030. **92+**.

**Huré Frères “4 Elements” Premier Cru Extra Brut (Ludes)****Disgorged March 2016**

The 4 Elements bottling from Huré Frères is comprised entirely of pinot meunier from the village of Ludes that was planted in 1966 and does not undergo malolactic fermentation. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter and the current release is base year 2012. The bouquet is bright and youthfully complex, offering up scents of white peach, floral tones, a fine base of soil, *patissière* and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with good depth in the mid-palate, refined *mousse* and a very long, zesty finish. This could do with a year or two in bottle to soften up and blossom, but it is very well made. 2017-2030+. **91+**.

**Jacquesson “Cuvée No. 739” Extra Brut NV (Dizy)****Disgorged October 2015**

The Jacquesson “Cuvée No. 739” is composed of a blend of fifty-seven percent chardonnay, twenty-two percent pinot meunier and twenty-one percent pinot noir. The wine is from the base year of 2011 and includes thirty-one percent reserve wines and was finished with a *dosage* of 3.5 grams per liter, after having spent three and a half years aging *sur latte*. The bouquet is pure and vibrant, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, a touch of peach, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil, a touch of almond and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, frothy *mousse* and excellent focus and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. This is drinking very well today, but has the structure to also age very gracefully. High class NV. 2016-2030. **92**.

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

It had been two years since I last tasted a bottle of the 2010 base year cuvée of the George Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature and the wine has really started to blossom over the course of that time. Most of the time, this cuvée is a blend of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier, and this is indeed the case with the 2010 version. The nose is still quite vibrant, but is starting to open up nicely, offering up a deep and pure constellation of apple, peach, a superb base of soil, almonds, fresh-baked bread and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and starting to really open up, with a rock solid core, fine soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a long, focused, complex and very classy finish. This is just a dynamite wine that is developing beautifully. I would be inclined to still let it sit in the cellar a few more years, so that it can completely blossom. 2018-2040. **93+**.

**Philipponnat “Non-Dosé” Royal Réserve Brut Nature NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ) Disg: 9/2011**

The current release of Philipponnat’s “Non-Dosé” Brut Nature is from the base year of 2007 and has had the benefit of five years of bottle age, in addition to the three and a half years it spent aging *sur latte*. The wine is now drinking at its apogee, offering up a complex bouquet of green apple, lemon, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate

the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and bone-dry finish. Even with five years of bottle age, this wine remains pretty tensile and really will be best for those who truly love the non-dosé style of bubbly. 2016-2025+. **90.**

**Jean-Marc Sélèque “les Solistes” Extra Brut NV (Pierry) Disgorged March 2016**

Jean-Marc Sélèque’s bottling “les Solistes” is comprised entirely of pinot meunier grown in the vineyard of Let Gouttes D’Or in Pierry, which Monsieur Sélèque plows by horse. The current release is from the base year of 2012, with half of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented and the other half fermented in cement eggs. The finishing *dosage* is two grams per liter and the wine jumps from the glass in a complex and vibrant blend of apple, white peach, lovely minerality, plenty of meunier floral tones, brioche and a touch of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully light on its feet, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and fine focus and grip on the long, poised and complex finish. This is a lovely bottle that seems perfectly balanced at its very low *dosage* level. 2016-2030+. **92.**

**Champagne Tarlant “Zero” Brut Nature NV (Oeuilly) Disgorged October 2015**

The current release of Tarlant Brut Nature NV is from the base year of 2008 and spent fully six years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The *cépages* is one third each of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine delivers a superb bouquet of apple, white peach, brioche, complex soil tones, a touch of smokiness and a bit of sweet walnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully complex, with brisk acids, a superb core, lovely soil drive, elegant *mousse* and a very long, focused and vibrant finish. The long aging *sur latte* for a non-vintage bottling is pretty extraordinary, and the wine has turned out marvelously from all of this patience! 2016-2030. **92.**

**Champagne Tarlant “Cuvée Louis” Brut Nature NV (Oeuilly) Disgorged December 2015**

The current release of the Tarlant family’s Cuvée Louis is from the base year of 2000 (eighty-five percent of the blend), with the balance made up of wines from 1999, 1998, 1997 and 1996. The wine was aged nearly fifteen years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir from the single vineyard of Les Crayons. The wine is simply stunning on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a deep and complex constellation of peach, fresh-baked bread, a touch of nuttiness, a complex base of minerality, smoky overtones and just a touch of buttery oak from the four year-old casks in which the *vins clairs* were raised. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully complex, with the wide open personality of the 2000 vintage in evidence, but with fine structure, elegant *mousse* and long, vibrant finish. This is a mature wine that it already drinking at its peak, and yet it is so beautifully balanced that it will have no trouble aging long and gracefully as well. *Chapeau!* 2016-2030+. **93+.**

**Blanc de Blancs Brut NV**

**Bergère Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Épernay)**

Champagne Bergère began in 1949 and is now run together by the second and third generations of the family. The house has vineyards spread over several villages, including Étoges, Congy and Fèrebrianges (all in the in the southern end of the Côte de Blancs), but the grapes for their Grand Cru bottling all hail from Avize. The wine spends four years aging *sur latte* and is finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and utterly classic, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, delicious apple, *crème patissière*, lovely chalky soil tones and a topnote of almond. On the palate the wine is crisp, focused and fullish, with

elegant *mousse*, a good core, fine mineral drive on the backend and impressive length and grip. This is a pretty, *aperitif*-styled example of Blanc de Blancs. 2016-2026+. **90.**

**Demière-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Oger)**

Nicolas Demièvre's current bottling of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is base year 2012 and the wine is absolutely singing at the present time. The *dosage* here is six grams per liter and the nose jumps from the glass in wide open constellation of pear, *crème patissière*, lovely chalkiness, a touch of fresh almond, gentle smokiness and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, lovely, frothy *mousse* and a long, racy finish. This is drinking very well indeed today, but will clearly last very well and it would be a fine bottle to lay down in the cellar as well. 2016-2030. **91+.**

**José Dhondt Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Oger)**

The current release of José Dhondt Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2013 and was finished off with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine offers up a fine, albeit, still youthful bouquet of lemon, apple, chalky soil tones, brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and racy, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and lovely balance and grip on the long and vibrant finish. This is tasty today, but I always find that a year or two in the cellar really works wonders on this cuvée, which blossoms beautifully with a bit of bottle age. 2016-2025+. **90+.**

**Lilbert-Fils Blanc de Blancs "Grand Cru" Brut NV (Cramant) Disgorged April 2016**

The current release of Lilbert-Fils non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is from the base year of 2012, but this only represents thirty-five percent of the blend, as thirty percent is from 2011 and another thirty-five percent from the 2010 vintage. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter, after having spent three years aging *sur latte*. The bouquet is excellent, offering up scents of pear, delicious apple, hazelnut, chalky minerality, brioche and incipient notes of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly youthful in structure, with a fine core, lovely backend mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is still a young wine and could do with a bit more bottle age to start to blossom, but it will be lovely once it has had a chance to relax a bit in bottle. 2017-2030. **90+.**

**The Rare Wine Company "le Mesnil" Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Mesnil) Disg: March 2016**

The new release of The Rare Wine Company's "le Mesnil" Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Brut hails from the base year of 2013 and was finished off with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine offers up a fine, youthful bouquet of apple, tart pear, chalky minerality, bread dough and a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp and clean, full-bodied and focused, with frothy *mousse*, a good core and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is very tasty juice that is drinking well out of the blocks, but will also age very nicely. 2016-2025+. **90.**

**Camille Savès "le Mont des Tours" Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Bouzy)**

This is the new, single vineyard Blanc de Blancs bottling from Camille Savès and it is excellent. The vineyard of le Mont des Tours is in the village of Bouzy, lying on the southwest corner of the slope here, in the direction of Tauxières. It is also the vineyard source for Benoît Lahaye's Rosé de Macération bottling, so it is clear that both pinot noir and chardonnay are planted here. The Savès chardonnay vines here are thirty years of age and the *vins clairs* for this new cuvée were all barrel-fermented. The wine does not undergo malo, is aged four years on its fine lees and finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The base year here is 2011, with ten

percent of the blend from 2010. The wine is superb on both the nose and palate, but as is typical of a young Blanc de Blancs that does not undergo malo, it is still pretty young and tensile and a few more years of bottle age are warranted. The bouquet offers up a refined constellation of apple, pear, lemon zest, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and excellent focus and grip on the long, well-balanced and still very primary finish. Have patience with this bottle, which will be outstanding in due course! 20219-2035+. **93.**



**Vazart-Coquart Blanc de Blancs “Réserve” -Brut NV (Chouilly)**

Jean-Pierre Vazart is one of my favorite growers in Chouilly and his current release of non-vintage Brut is lovely. This is base year 2013 and is still a bit tightly-knit, but it is a fine bottle and should blossom beautifully with another six months of age. The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, delicious apples, hazelnut, chalky minerality, brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, young and very promising, with an excellent core, frothy *mousse*, snappy acids and lovely focus and grip on the long finish. This is still a puppy and could use some time to unwind structurally, but the all the constituent components are in place! 2017-2030+. **91.**

***Brut and Blanc de Noirs NV***

**Ayala “Brut Majeur” NV (Aÿ)**

**Disgorged March 2015**

This is the same cuvée of Brut Majeur I reported on last summer, with the wine now having had a chance to spend another year aging in bottle and really starting to blossom fully.

The *cépages* is forty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot noir and twenty percent pinot meunier, with the *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and really wide open now, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of apple, peach, warm bread, lovely soil tones, fruit blossoms and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, lovely balance and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. The *dosage* here is really nicely done, as it balances the acidity here seamlessly. A fine bottle. 2016-2030+. **90+**.

**Barnaut “Grande Réserve” Grand Cru Brut NV (Bouzy) Disgorged October 2015**

The current release of Barnaut “Grande Réserve” non-vintage Brut is composed of a blend of two-thirds pinot noir and one-third chardonnay, with the grapes sources from the family’s vineyards in Bouzy, Ambonnay and Louvois. The wine was aged *sur latte* for just under four years and finished off with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of white peach, *patissière*, plenty of smokiness, a fine base of soil and incipient nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a good core, refined *mousse* and very good length and grip on the focused finish. This is a classic bottle of Bouzy bubbly. 2016-2025+. **91**.

**Bollinger “Spéciale Cuvée” Brut NV (Aÿ)**

The new release of Bollinger “Spéciale Cuvée” non-vintage Brut is good, but not great, and is really not quite up to the standards of the most recent releases of this consistently excellent wine. Perhaps this is base year 2011, which was difficult in the Champagne region? On the nose the wine offers up a typically pinot noir-dominated mélange of peach, apple, good soil tones, fresh-baked bread and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and only moderate deep at the core, with elegant *mousse*, good, but not great acids and only modest length on the slightly sweet finish. The *dosage* on this particular bottle seems a tad over generous, and the finish is notably short by the standards of this bottling. 2016-2025. **86**.

**Jacques Defrance “Brut Exception” NV (les Riceys) Disgorged October 2015**

Christophe Defrance is currently the head of this fine small domaine, located in the Aube. The current release of his Brut Exception is from the base year of 2010 and is comprised entirely of pinot blanc. The *vins clairs* are raised in stainless steel and went through full malolactic fermentation. The bouquet is complex and beautifully expressive, wafting from the glass in a mix of peach, pear, brioche, musky floral tones and a fine base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and light on its feet, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, and good balance and grip on the vibrant finish. This is a lovely *aperitif* weight bubbly, with a quite unique profile from its pinot blanc origins. Good juice. 2016-2025+. **90**.

**Jacques Defrance “Brut Prestige” NV (les Riceys) Disgorged October 2015**

This was the first time I had tasted a wine from Champagne Jacques Defrance and I was very impressed with the depth and refinement found in their “Brut Prestige” bottling. This is an excellent wine that shows plenty of complexity from its thirty percent reserve wines included in the cuvée. The wine is from the base year of 2009, the *cépages* is ninety percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir and the *vins clairs* were raised in stainless steel and going through full malo. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of pear, hazelnut, *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones and brioche. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, lovely focus and balance and a long, refined and vibrant finish. This is drinking with great style right now, but clearly will cruise along at this high level for at least another decade. 2016-2025+. **92**.



### **Dehours et Fils “Grande Réserve” Brut NV (Cerseuil)**

Jérôme Dehours is making outstanding wines and I was very happy to see a new release of his Grande Réserve in time for this article. I would love to see just a bit of information on the back label about the base year, date of disgorgement and *cépages*, but there is none on this bottling. The new release of Grande Réserve is its customary blend of sixty percent pinot meunier, thirty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir and again includes twenty-six percent reserve wines, coming from the estate’s solera started in 1988. The *dosage* is six grams per liter. The bouquet is lovely and shows plenty of meunier floral shadings in its mélange of apple, peach, a touch of hazelnut, gently musky floral tones, a fine base of soil and fresh-baked bread. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and very nicely balanced, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles and very good length and grip on the nascently complex and quite elegant finish. This is fine juice. 2016-2030. **91.**

### **Pierre Gerbais “Réserve” Brut NV (Celles sur Ource)**

**Disgorged March 2016**

The current release of the non-vintage Brut bottling from Pierre Gerbais is base year 2012 and is composed of a blend of fifty percent pinot noir, twenty-five percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot blanc. It was finished off with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The bouquet is bright and complex, offering up a mix of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, good minerality and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows a bit more mid-palate amplitude at the core from its higher *dosage* than the Extra Brut version, with elegant *mousse* and good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This does not seem quite as clean and precise on the backend as the Extra Brut, though in effect they are the same wine with slightly different *dosage* and probably just needs some time to snap back into focus. 2016-2025+. **90.**

### **Henri Giraud “Esprit de Giraud” Brut NV (Aÿ)**

The current release of Henri Giraud “Esprit de Giraud” non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2011, with five percent of the blend made up of reserve wines. The *cépages* is seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and spends fully a year aging before being bottled. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up a fine constellation of apple, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil, gentle smokiness and a topnote of caraway seed. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely balanced, with good, but not great depth at the core (perhaps this is the 2011 vintage?), elegant *mousse* and lovely complexity on the impressively long and zesty finish. Good juice. 2016-2026+. **90.**

### **Henri Giraud “Fût de Chêne MV” Grand Cru Brut NV (Aÿ)**

The new release of Henri Giraud’s “Fût de Chêne” non-vintage MV is composed of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay, with the wine from the base year of 2005. It was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine offers up a gently new oaky constellation of pear, white peach, brioche, dried flowers, lovely soil tones and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, impressive focus and grip, refined *mousse* and just a bit of wood tannin perking up the long and complex finish. Purists are probably not going to be happy with the overt touch of new wood here (twenty percent of the casks are new for this cuvée, with all of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented), but the wine is impeccably well-balanced, very long and shows superb backend lift, and I can live very happily with its bit of new oakiness! 2016-2030. **92.**

**Henri Giraud “Hommage à François Hémart” Grand Cru Brut NV (Aÿ)**

The Henri Giraud “Hommage à François Hémart” non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2012 and is composed of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay, with all of the grapes from the family’s vineyards in the village of Aÿ. The *vins clairs* are fermented in stainless steel and then spend six months aging in small casks prior to *assemblage* and the wine is finished with a *dosage* of 7.5 grams per liter. The bouquet offers up a bright and complex nose of apple, peach, *patissière*, lovely soil tones, almonds and a bit of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with very elegant *mousse*, a fine core, impeccable focus and balance and a long, pure and wide open finish. I did not receive any information on how much reserve wine is included in the blend, but based on how well this is drinking from a base year of 2012, I have to assume that there is a significant percentage of reserve wines in the cuvée. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2025+. **92.**

**Henri Giraud “Code Noir” Grand Cru Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Aÿ)**

The current release of Henri Giraud “Code Noir” is from the base year of 2010 and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. It is comprised entirely of pinot noir and offers up a simply superb bouquet of peach, apple, fresh-baked bread, complex soil tones, a touch of almond and a discreet framing of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a superb core, elegant *mousse*, still quite brisk acidity and outstanding focus and balance on the long and vibrant finish. This is still a very young wine and it will get immeasurably better with further bottle age, but it is not a bad drink right now, as it is so well-balanced as to be very accessible in its youthful state. 2016-2035. **92.**

**Huré Frères “Invitation” Brut NV (Ludes)****Disgorged March 2016**

Fifteen percent of the *vins clairs* for the current release of the Huré Frères “Invitation” non-vintage Brut did not go through malo, with fully forty percent of the *cépages* comprised of reserve wines from the family solera started back in 1982. The base year here is 2012 and the blend is twenty percent chardonnay and forty percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter and offers up a bright and classy nose of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, a touch of nuttiness and a gentle smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and classy, with elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the bright and wide open finish. 2016-2030. **91.**

**Janisson Baradon et Fils “Brut Selection” NV (Épernay)**

The Janisson Baradon et Fils “Brut Selection” non-vintage bottling is a fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and chardonnay, with thirty percent of the blend comprised of reserve wines. The current release is from the base year of 2012, was aged *sur latte* for three years and was finished off with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The *vins clairs* are raised in a combination of stainless steel and older Burgundy casks, with everything going through malo for this bottling. The wine offers up a complex bouquet of peach, orange zest, plenty of smokiness, warm biscuits, lovely soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely balanced, with a good core, slightly larger bubbles and good length and grip on the vibrant finish. Other than slightly coarser *mousse*, this is exemplary non-vintage Brut, with depth and complexity derived from a nice touch of leesiness. I really like the backend bounce here. 2016-2025. **90.**

**Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut NV (Cumières) Magnum Disgorged Oct. 2013**

This magnum of Vincent Laval’s Cumières Brut is a special bottling that is actually a Blanc de Noirs, though it does not state this anywhere on the label. This is a one hundred percent pinot noir cuvée that is an equal blend of the 2011, 2010 and 2009 vintages and was finished

with a discreet *dosage* of two grams per liter. This was made from the production of the young vine pinot noir that Vincent began to plant as his very old vines that used to go into the Les Hautes Chèvres bottling started to run out of steam. I had only tasted this magnum on one previous occasion, about two and a half years ago, and I was very delighted to see it on the table! The bouquet is developing beautifully, wafting from the glass in a fine nose of white cherry, apple, tart orange, complex minerality, citrus peel, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, refined *mousse*, lovely length and grip and a still fairly youthful profile on the finish. Despite this being from young vine fruit, this is a properly structured Laval wine and could still do with a few more years in the cellar to blossom completely. It is high class juice and I was a bit conservative with my score on the wine a couple of years ago! 2018-2040. **92+**.

**Gérard Lorient “Brut Tradition” NV (Mesnil le Huttier)**

The village of Mesnil le Huttier is located just to the west of Épernay in the start of the Marne Valley. Monsieur Lorient farms 7.5 hectares of vines here, with nearly all of his bottlings made from one hundred percent pinot meunier, as this is one of the real sweet spots in the region for this grape. His current release of Brut Tradition is from the base year of 2012, is one hundred percent meunier, and was aged three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine is pure and elegant on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a classy blend of apple, pinot meunier floral tones, really lovely soil nuances, *patissière* and just a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and displays excellent mid-palate depth, with pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and very nice length and grip on the vibrant finish. Lovely juice. 2016-2030. **91**.

**Gérard Lorient “Brut Sélection” NV (Mesnil le Huttier)**

The current release of Gérard Lorient “Brut Sélection” is from the base year of 2012 and this is one of the few bottlings here that is not entirely meunier, as the *cépages* here is fifty percent chardonnay and fifty percent pinot meunier. This is the old vine, non-vintage bottling from Monsieur Lorient, with all of the fruit included in this cuvée hailing from vines that are at least fifty years of age. The stylish bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy blend of apples, white peach, complex minerality, dried flowers and *patissière*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and focused, with an excellent core, really refined *mousse* and a very long, complex and elegant finish. High class bubbly and an excellent value. 2016-2030+. **92**.

**Louis Roederer “Brut Premier” NV (Reims)**

The new release of Louis Roederer “Brut Premier” is composed of its traditional blend of forty percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir, with the balance made up of pinot meunier. The wine is aged three years *sur latte* and an additional six months in bottle after disgorgement. The bouquet is truly superb, wafting from the glass in a precise and vibrant blend of apple, gentle notes of tangerine, beautifully complex soil nuances, warm bread and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and supremely elegant, with a lovely core, seamless balance, refined *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. I love the precise elegance of this release. This is one of the best examples of Brut Premier in years! 2016-2030+. **92**.

**Pol Roger “Réserve” Brut NV (Épernay)**

The current release of Pol Roger’s non-vintage Brut “Réserve” is comprised of equal parts chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine ages for a minimum of three years *sur latte*. The wine delivers a fine bouquet of white peach, apple, distinctive meunier floral tones, brioche, a fine base of soil and a whisper

of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and racy, with a fine core of fruit, refined *mousse*, lovey bounce and grip and a long, well-balanced and still fairly youthful finish. I have had very good experiences aging this cuvée in my cellar (and currently have close to the case of the release from 2014 resting comfortably) and feel the current release could be another fine wine for mid-term aging, despite the wine being quite tasty to drink today. 2016-2035. **91+**.

**Camille Savès “Carte Blanche” Premier Cru Brut NV (Bouzy)**

The current release of Camille Savès “Carte Blanche” non-vintage Brut is a blend of seventy-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay. The wine is aged three years *sur latte* and is all grand cru fruit, with the exception of the chardonnay, which hails from the village of Tauxières and is only entitled to Premier Cru status. Like all of the house’s wines, it did not undergo malolactic fermentation. The bouquet is deep and classic, wafting from the glass in a generous blend of apple, peach, *patissière*, lovely soil tones and bread dough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced and wide open finish. I did not ask which base year this iteration is from, but it seems probable that this would be 2011. A stylish bottle. 2016-2025+. **90+**.

**Camille Savès “les Loges” Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Bouzy)**

The les Loges bottling from Camille Savès is a new, single vineyard bottling that is comprised entirely of pinot noir. The vineyard sits mid-slope in Bouzy, northwest of the village center in the direction of Louvois and the Savès parcel is thirty-five years of age. The base year is 2011, with ten percent of the blend from the previous vintage, and all of the *vins clairs* were barrel fermented. The wine was aged four years *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. Like all of the Savès wines, there was no malo. The bouquet is deep, pure and very refined, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of white peach, gentle smokiness, bread dough, a complex base of chalky soil tones and a nice touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and displays superb mid-palate depth, with fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse*, properly youthful and zesty structure and a very long, focused finish. This is terrific wine that I would be inclined to give a few years in the cellar to develop more of its secondary layers of complexity, but it is eminently drinkable today! 2018-2035. **93+**.

**Jean-Marc Sélèque “Solessence” Brut NV (Pierry)**

**Disgorged March 2016**

The new release of Jean-Marc Sélèque “Solessence” non-vintage Brut is composed of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and ten percent pinot noir and is from the base year of 2013, though fifty percent of the cuvée is actually reserve wines. The wine spent two years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of apple, white peach, brioche, a touch of almond, chalky soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with a superb core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a long, brisk and focused finish. This is still a young wine, but it is beautifully made and will offer more generosity on the palate with another few months in the bottle. It should age very nicely indeed. 2017-2035. **91**.



*Are Champagne Laval tattoos the next big thing in New York?*

### **Taittinger “Brut Réserve” NV (Reims)**

The current release of Taittinger’s “Brut Réserve” is composed of a blend of forty percent chardonnay and a sixty percent mix of pinot noir and pinot meunier, with the wine spending three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of apple, a touch of lemon, bread dough, chalky soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and very well-balanced, with elegant *mousse*, bright acids and good length and grip on the youthfully complex finish. This is a lovely middleweight that should age quite nicely, even though it is drinking with style today. 2016-2030+. **90.**

### **Taittinger “la Française” Brut NV (Reims)**

Taittinger’s “la Française” bottling of non-vintage Brut is the same *cépages* as the wine above, but spend an additional year aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement, so effectively, this is one year older for its base vintage. I do wish that Taittinger would join with *Grandes Marques* such as Charles Heidsieck and provide more technical details on their back label, as it would be nice to know the *dosage* and the date of disgorgement. In any case, the bouquet on the current release of la Française is excellent, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, white flowers, a very good base of soil tones and just a hint of the smokiness to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp

and rock solid at the core, with elegant *mousse*, excellent focus and grip, fine acidity and a long, complex finish. The extra year on the lees really adds mid-palate depth and palate presence here *vis à vis* the Brut Réserve. As I have mentioned in the past, the *dosage* for this bottling has decreased noticeably in the last few years and the wine is all the better for it, as there is a mineral precision on the backend today that is exemplary! 2016-2035. **92.**

### ***Brut and Extra Brut Rosé***

#### **Ayala “Rosé Majeur” Brut NV (Aÿ)**

**Disgorged March 2014**

The current release of non-vintage Ayala Rosé Majeur Brut is a blend of fifty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot noir and ten percent pinot meunier. The wine was aged three years *sur latte* and receives a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The wine is a pale salmon color and offers up a bright and complex nose of tangerine, woodsmoke, chalky soil tones, a touch of citrus peel, clove-like spices and rye toast. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and classy, with a good core, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and fine length on the finish. This is more of a middleweight stylistically, but it is not short on intensity of flavor or complexity and really is a lovely example. Given the date of disgorgement, I am guessing that this is the same cuvée I tasted last year, with the additional year in bottle really allowing the wine to open up nicely. 2016-2030. **91.**

#### **Ayala “Rosé No. 8” Brut NV (Aÿ)**

**Disgorged October 2015**

The Ayala “Rosé No. 8” is a new cuvée from this fine house in Aÿ that is composed entirely of fruit from premier cru and grand cru vineyards. This first release also hails from the superb 2008 vintage, though it is not vintage-dated on the label. The wine’s *cépages* is fifty-one percent chardonnay (all sourced in the village of Rilly-la-Montagne) and forty-nine percent pinot noir (Aÿ, Verzenay and Verzy) and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter, after having spent more than seven years aging on its fine lees. The wine is a shade darker than the Rosé Majeur bottling and delivers an outstanding bouquet of blood orange, cherries, complex minerality, discreet spice tones and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a superb core, elegant *mousse*, lovely acidity and fine length and backend mineral drive on the complex finish. This is outstanding Rosé that should age long and gracefully and will be even better with a few years in the cellar. 2016-2040. **93+.**

#### **Barnaut “Authentique” Brut Rosé NV (Bouzy)**

**Disgorged April 2015**

The Barnaut non-vintage bottling “Authentique Brut Rosé is made by the *saignée* method and is composed of a blend of eighty-five percent pinot noir and fifteen percent chardonnay. It was aged three years *sur latte*, making this base year 2011, and was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine is a lovely salmon color and offers up a deep, complex and vinous nose of cherries, blood orange, rye toast, cinnamon, plenty of smokiness and a fine base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully light on its feet, with a fine core of fruit, a touch of Gevrey-like meatiness, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the vibrant and focused finish. This is superb! 2016-2030. **92.**

#### **Bollinger Brut Rosé NV (Aÿ)**

The new release of Bollinger’s non-vintage Brut Rosé (at least I assume this is a new cuvée, but there is no date of disgorgement on the back label) has the same *cépages* as last year: sixty-two percent pinot noir, twenty-four percent chardonnay and fourteen percent pinot meunier with five percent of the reds still wines. The wine is a lovely salmon color and was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and classy, delivering scents of white

cherries, rye bread, blood orange, a complex base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and a spicy topnote redolent of clove and cinnamon stick. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, impeccable balance and a long, crisp and focused finish. This is really a classy non-vintage Brut Rosé. 2016-2030+. **92.**

**Jacques Defrance Brut Rosé NV (les Riceys)**

**Disgorged October 2015**

The Jacques Defrance non-vintage Brut Rosé is from the base year of 2009, with a percentage of reserve wines from the previous year of '08. The wine's *cépages* is ninety-five percent pinot noir and five percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* fermented and raised in stainless steel and undergoing full malo. The wine's color is a fairly deep salmon, with just a touch of golden flecking starting to show some maturation. The bouquet is complex and nicely vinous, wafting from the glass in a mix of blood orange, rhubarb, plenty of smokiness, a touch of clove, chalky minerality and sourdough bread. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows lovely mid-palate amplitude from the ripeness of '09, with elegant *mousse*, bright framing acids and very good length and grip on the focused and complex finish. The *dosage* seems just a touch generous, which keeps the score down a tad. Like many wines based on the 2009 vintage, this will not make old bones, but it is very tasty at the present time. 2016-2023. **89.**

**José Dhondt Brut Rosé NV (Oger)**

I do not know why, but I often find the younger examples of José Dhondt Brut Rosé a bit reduced when they are first released, and this is again the case with the new cuvée, which hails from the base year of 2013. Underneath the touch of reduction is a nose that is bright and fairly high-toned, offering up scents of blood orange, cherries, wheat toast, orange peel and chalky soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with a good core and classy *mousse*. The finish is long and focused, but a tad reductive today. This wine needs some bottle age to blossom and if the reduction completely blows off, it will be a stylish middleweight. I really need to start cellaring a few bottles of this each year and see how it handles its reductive elements with bottle age. 2017-2025. **86-90+?**

**Pierre Gerbais Brut Rosé NV (Celles sur Ource)**

**Disgorged March 2016**

The new release of Pierre Gerbais non-vintage Brut Rosé is base year 2012 and was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The wine is a blend of fifty percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent each of chardonnay and pinot blanc, with ten percent of the pinot noir still wine for color. The bouquet is pure and vibrant, jumping from the glass in a blend of blood orange, cherries, smoke, cloves, *patissière* and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and zesty, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a lovely bottle of Brut Rosé. 2016-2025. **91.**

**Henri Giraud "Fût de Chêne MV" Rosé Grand Cru Brut NV (Aÿ)**

The Henri Giraud "Fût de Chêne MV" Rosé was first released in early 2014, with the quality of the 2005 vintage for pinot noir prompting the family to set aside a cask of still red wine from this vintage to be used for producing their first bottling of this wine, which ended up being produced from the base year of 2007. The *cépages* is seventy-eight percent pinot noir (eight percent of this is still red from '05) and twenty-two percent chardonnay, with five percent of the pinot noir included as still red wine. The bouquet on the current release is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex and gently new oaky blend of cherries, peach, gentle spice tones, *patissière*, a fine base of soil, orange blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, balanced and rock solid at the core, with superb soil signature, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and vibrant finish. If anything, the



touch of new oak here works even better than in the non-Rosé Fût de Chêne MV bottling. This is an excellent wine. 2016-2030+. **93.**

**Huré Frères “Insouciance” Brut Rosé NV (Ludes)**

**Disgorged March 2016**

The current release of Huré Frères “Insouciance” Brut Rosé is from the base year of 2013. The wine’s *cépages* is forty percent pinot noir, thirty-five percent pinot meunier and twenty-five percent chardonnay, with five percent of the pinot noir being the still red wine added to the blend to give the wine its lovely salmon color. *Dosage* is around seven grams per liter. The wine is young and pretty on the nose, offering up a bright blend of cherry skin, smoke, wheat toast and a stylish base of soil. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, fine focus and very good length and grip on the youthful finish. This is very tasty today and will be even better with a bit of bottle age. 2016-2025. **90.**

**Gérard Lorient Brut Rosé NV (Mesnil le Huttier)**

The new bottling of Gérard Lorient non-vintage Brut Rosé is base year 2013 and the wine is one hundred percent pinot meunier. The wine is excellent, delivering impressive complexity in its vibrant bouquet of white cherries, chalky soil tones, lovely floral nuances, orange peel and a touch of sourdough bread. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and impeccably balanced, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and lovely focus and grip on the long, complex and elegant finish. Lovely juice. 2016-2030. **92.**

**Marguet Père et Fils “Shaman 12” Grand Cru Extra Brut Rosé NV (Ambonnay)**

The Marguet Père et Fils “Shaman 12” Extra Brut Rosé is one of my absolute favorite bottlings of non-vintage Rosé. The *cépages* of the 2012 version is seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent pinot noir. The nose is lovely, delivering a pure and vibrant blend of *fraises du bois*, blood orange, a touch of caraway seed, a fine base of chalk, wheat toast, citrus peel and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and classy, with a lovely core, ideal delineation, crisp acids, very elegant *mousse* and a long, laser-like finish. I know I just reviewed this wine a few months ago, but given that it is currently widely available in the market, I thought I would reiterate just how beautiful of a bottle of Rosé this is and encourage folks to tuck some away in the cellar before it is sold through. 2016-2035. **93.**

**Camille Savès Grand Cru Brut Rosé NV (Bouzy)**

Given that the house of Camille Savès is based in the village of Bouzy, it is not surprising that Brut Rosé is one of the house specialties here, but what is surprising is that this cuvée has the highest percentage of chardonnay of any of the Savès bottlings, with fully sixty percent of the blend comprised of this white grape. The remainder is of course pinot noir, with twelve percent being still pinot from Bouzy. The new release is excellent, delivering a classy bouquet of strawberries, white cherries, warm bread, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and delicate spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very refined in personality, with an excellent core, elegant *mousse* and fine focus and grip on the long and beautifully balanced finish. This is delicious today, but it has the structure to age and I have had marvelous results tucking this bottling away in the cellar for five or six years of evolution in the bottle. 2016-2030. **92+.**

**Jean-Marc Sélèque “Solessence” Brut Rosé NV (Pierry)**

**Disgorged June 2015**

The new release of Jean-Marc Sélèque non-vintage Brut Rosé how has a cuvée name on the label: “Solessence”. The wine is from the base year of 2013, with forty percent reserve wines included and was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The *cépages* is the same as last year’s version: forty-five percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and fifteen percent

pinot noir. As I mentioned last year, Monsieur Sélèque produces this beautiful, deep salmon color through a combination of some skin contact and a bit of still red wine added (both meunier and pinot noir). The new release is stellar and a superb follow-up to last year's version, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, a touch of blood orange, lovely smokiness, pomegranate, chalky soil tones, discreet spice tones and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a good core, very elegant *mousse*, good balance and grip and very good length on the finish. Last year's version, based on the superior 2012 vintage, was just a touch longer on the backend, but this is once again a very well-made and delicious bottle of non-vintage Brut Rosé. 2016-2030. **91.**

**Jean-Marc Sélèque “les Solistes” Extra Brut Rosé NV (Pierry)      Disgorged March 2015**

The les Solistes bottling of Extra Brut Rosé from Jean-Marc Sélèque is comprised entirely of pinot meunier, all from the vineyard of les Charmiers in the village of Pierry, with the vines having been planted in 1964 and 1967. Monsieur Sélèque allows forty-eight hours of skin contact to give this wine its color, with the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented (but not going through malo) and finished off with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The current release is base year 2011 and the wine spent three years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The color is fairly deep salmon and the nose is vibrant, complex and classy, jumping from the glass in a mix of blood orange, cherry skin, rye bread, superb minerality, a dollop of clove and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a superb core, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is lovely out of the blocks, but will clearly blossom with further bottle age. High class Rosé. 2016-2030. **92.**

**Taittinger “Préstage Rosé” Brut NV (Reims)**

The current release of Taittinger's non-vintage “Préstage Rosé” is composed of a blend of fifty percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot meunier, with fifteen percent of the blend being still pinot noir from the villages of Ambonnay and Bouzy. The wine is aged *sur latte* for three years prior to disgorgement. The wine is a beautiful salmon color and offers up a vibrant bouquet of cherries, blood orange, rye toast, a touch of clove, a fine dollop of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very well-balanced, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the vibrant and still fairly youthful finish. This cuvée has a fine track record for aging, and though it is very tasty today, I would not hesitate to tuck it away in the cellar for a few years and really let it blossom! 2016-2030+. **90+.**

**Champagne Tarlant “Zero” Brut Nature Rosé NV (Oeuilly)      Disgorged October 2015**

The current release of Tarlant “Zero” Brut Nature Rosé is from the base year of 2009 and spent five years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The *cépages* is eighty-five percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot noir and the wine offers up a bright and zesty nose of blood orange, rhubarb, a touch of musky spice tones, woodsmoke, fine soil, cloves and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a superb core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, lovely transparency and a very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Even though this wine spent one year less *sur latte* than the non-Rosé version, the riper aspect of the '09 vintage has given this even better balance for current drinking. Beautiful juice. 2016-2030. **92+.**

**Vazart-Coquart Brut Rosé NV (Chouilly)**

The Vazart-Coquart non-vintage Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of ninety percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir, with all of the pinot being still red wine. The current release is base year 2012 and offers up a lovely nose of strawberries, blood orange, rye toast,

chalky soil notes and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite racy in personality, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and lovely grip and balance on the focused and impressively long finish. This is very tasty. 2016-2025. **90+**.

### ***Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs***

#### **2010 Demièvre-Ansiot “Neyrot” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature (Oger)**

The 2010 Demièvre-Ansiot “Neyrot” Blanc de Blancs is a lovely bottle of non-*dosé* Champagne, but to my palate, it could have been even better with just a touch of *dosage* (say, three or four grams?) to help buffer its serious girdle of youthful acidity. The bouquet is pure and zesty, jumping from the glass in a mix of pear, chalky minerality, pastry cream, a touch of nutskin and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely rock solid at the core, with bracing acids, laser-like focus and outstanding length and grip on the really very well-balanced finish. Purists who love low or no *dosage* bubbly are going to love this wine, but tasting it today, my palate really wanted the structure buffered just a touch more with a dollop of *dosage*, which I believe would take it up yet another notch in quality. 2016-2030+. **92.**

#### **2010 José Dhondt “Mes Vieilles Vignes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Oger)**

The 2010 José Dhondt “Mes Vieilles Vignes”, from Monsieur Dhondt’s half hectare of 1941-planted vines, is outstanding, but will need some bottle age to soften up and blossom properly. The bouquet is pure and very precise, offering up scents of pear, apple, fresh almond, plenty of smokiness, complex, limestone minerality and bread dough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and a very long, focused and snappy finish. In principal, one could drink this wine today, but this cuvée has such an outstanding track record for aging that I would tuck it away in the cellar for the next four or five years before starting to open bottles. 2020-2040+. **93+**.

#### **2010 Lilbert-Fils Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut Millésime (Cramant) Disg: April 2016**

The vintage-dated bottling from Lilbert-Fils hails entirely from their vineyards in the village of Cramant, with the 2010 having been finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The wine spent fully five years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is deep, complex and very classy, offering up scents of pear, apple, toasted almond, lovely limestone minerality, a touch of *crème patissière*, spring flowers and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a rock solid core, frothy *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a very long, very well-balanced and still fairly youthful finish. This is quite easy to drink today, but it is clearly still climbing in quality and four or five years in the cellar are going to return handsome dividends! Excellent juice. 2016-2035+. **93.**

#### **2009 José Dhondt “Mes Vieilles Vignes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Oger)**

The 2009 vintage of Mes Vieilles Vignes from Monsieur Dhondt is far more forward than its 2010 counterpart, as one would expect, given the style and shape of the two vintages. This shows lovely ripeness on both the nose and palate, wafting from the glass in a bouquet of apple, hazelnut, dried flowers, warm biscuits, chalky and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racier in structure than the wide open nose suggests, with elegant *mousse*, a fine core and very good length and grip on the vibrant finish. This is a lovely bottle that is already drinking well today, but the 2010 version probably has a small edge in terms of precision and purity. 2016-2030+. **92.**

### **2009 Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims)**

It had been a bit over a year since I last tasted the 2009 Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime, and the wine has started to blossom nicely and is really starting to come into its own. As readers may recall, this wine was aged just under five years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, with the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented in *foudres* and not undergoing malolactic fermentation. The finishing *dosage* is nine grams per liter. The bouquet is showing a bit more almond than it back in the summer of 2015, wafting from the glass in a superb blend of pear, apple, lovely nuttiness, a fine base of chalky minerality, gentle fruit blossoms, brioche and still that exotic (and truly captivating) topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and already starting to blossom nicely, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a very long, complex and classy finish. The warmer vintage character of 2009 has allowed this wine to come forward a bit quicker than I anticipated when I tasted the wine last and the wine is drinking very nicely today. It may not last quite as long as I anticipated when I tasted it soon after release, but it is now ready and showing beautifully. 2016-2030+. **93.**

### **2008 Ployez-Jacquemart Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut (Ludes)**

The 2008 Ployez-Jacquemart Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut is a lovely wine that spent at least four years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, but there is no information on when this particular bottle was disgorged. The Ployez family barrel-ferments the *vin clairs* for this bottling (in the same manner as their *Tête de Cuvée*, the Liesse d'Harbonville) and the '08 is just starting to stretch its wings and drink beautifully. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of pear, delicious apple, a touch of almond, chalky soil tones, brioche and a gentle topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nicely structured, with very elegant *mousse*, a fine core and excellent length and grip on the focused and classy finish. I do not know what the *dosage* is here, but I would guess around two grams per liter. Fine juice that will only improve with further bottle age. 2016-2035+. **92.**

### **2008 Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Épernay)**

The 2008 vintage of Pol Roger's Blanc de Blancs is outstanding, offering up impressive depth and breed on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a refined and vibrant constellation of delicious apple, pear, toasted almond, beautiful *Crayères* minerality, brioche, apple blossoms and incipient notes of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, and rock solid at the core, with utterly refined *mousse*, beautiful mineral drive on the backend, bright acids and outstanding focus and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. This is great Blanc de Blancs, and though it is all too easy to drink today, it is built to age and will be even better five to ten years down the road! Great juice. 2016-2045. **94+.**

### **2008 Vazart-Coquart "Special Club" Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Chouilly)**

It had been about fifteen months since I last tasted the 2008 Special Club bottling from Jean-Pierre Vazart and the wine continues to blossom beautifully. Today the nose is quite open, jumping from the glass in a fine blend of apple, pear, brioche, complex, chalky minerality, smoke, almond and a nice topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and impeccably balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil inflection, elegant *mousse* and a very long, refined and still quite zesty finish. The inherent elegance of the 2008 vintage is beautifully reflected in this very classy bottle of Blanc de Blancs. Though it is quite approachable today, I would still give it at least another handful of years in the cellar, as the wine will continue to develop more of its secondary layers of complexity with further bottle age. Very high class juice. 2020-2045+. **93+.**



### **2007 Ayala Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Aÿ)**

**Disgorged December 2013**

I last tried a bottle of the fine 2007 Ayala Blanc de Blancs two years ago and the wine has blossomed nicely in the interim. This is all grand cru fruit, with Ayala sourcing the grapes from the villages of Mesnil, Chouilly and Avize. Today the wine is quite wide open and drinking beautifully, offering up a complex nose of pear, delicious apple, a touch of lemon peel, brioche, a touch of almond pastry cream and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, poised and well-balanced, with good depth at the core, elegant *mousse*, fine framing acids and very good length on the complex finish. As this has opened up, it has lost just a touch of backend grip and is clearly now at its apogee of peak drinkability. I would be inclined to drink this over the next few years, for though it has the capability to last for another decade or so, I have the sense that the wine has now peaked and will not be more interesting than it is today. 2016-2020+. **91.**

### **2006 Domaine Georges Laval “Les Chênes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature**

This was the first time I had ever tried the 2006 vintage of Les Chênes from Vincent Laval and the wine was starting to really drink beautifully at age ten. The bouquet is pure and gorgeous today, offering up a fine constellation of pear, apple, tangerine, brioche, pastry cream and a refined base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very elegant in profile, with a rock solid core, bright acids, pinpoint bubbles and outstanding length and grip on the poised, focused and vibrant finish. This is just starting to enter its plateau

of maturity and should cruise along at a very high level for at least the next quarter century. 2016-2040+. **94.**

**2006 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Brut (Reims)**

The 2006 vintage of Taittinger's iconic Comtes de Champagne bottling is a beautifully refined example of the vintage, offering up a pure and vibrant bouquet of apple, pear, brioche, complex, chalky soil tones, hazelnut, a touch of orange zest, white flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and supremely elegant in profile, with outstanding mid-palate intensity, utterly refined *mousse*, bright acids and laser-like focus on the very long, nascently complex finish. Whereas many examples from the 2006 vintage are drinking very well at age ten, it is still very early days for this outstanding Comtes de Champagne and this wine will not peak for at least another decade, though it is already very, very easy to drink! I would be inclined to let it hibernate in the cellar for at least another five years, just to allow its secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. 2021-2060. **96.**

**2006 Vazart-Coquart "Grand Bouquet" Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime Magnum**

As I reported on a couple of years ago, after visiting Jean-Pierre Vazart in his cellars in Chouilly, the primary difference between his regular vintage-dated bottlings, Grand Bouquet, and his Special Club cuvée, is that the latter ages *sur latte* under cork, rather than crown cap. This is also true of all his magnums and larger formats, so essentially, bigger bottles of vintage-dated wine from Monsieur Vazart are all Special Club wines. The 2006 magnum is really drinking beautifully today, wafting from the glass in a maturing blend of apple, brioche, toasted almond, plenty of smokiness and chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and *à point*, with a lovely core, fine balance and grip, elegant *mousse* and very good length on the finish. I tasted this right on the heels of the Vazart 2008 Special Club, which underscored just how precise the 2008 vintage has ended up. But, this is a lovely drink today. 2016-2035. **92.**

**2004 Vazart-Coquart "Grand Bouquet" Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime Jeroboam**

The 2004 vintage is really starting to stir and the wines are amongst my favorite vintage-dated bubbly for current drinking, but also with the capacity to continue to age gracefully. Jean-Pierre Vazart's 2004 is really beautiful- particularly out of jeroboam- as it delivers a deep and vibrant bouquet of pear, apple, lemon blossoms, warm biscuits, chalky soil tones and a topnote of almond paste. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied, pure and very precise, with fine mid-palate depth, lovely complexity, refined *mousse* and a very, very long, racy and classic finish. This is a beautiful drink today, but there is still room for further growth in complexity with more cellaring. A lovely wine. 2016-2035+. **93+.**

**2002 Champagne Corbon Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Avize)**

I last tasted the 2002 vintage of Blanc de Blancs from Agnès Corbon and her father Claude back in the summer of 2011, and I really missed this wine then! Perhaps it was just too young, or perhaps I was tasted out in the heat of the summer on that particular day, but the wine was showing so much more beautifully on this most recent occasion (which also happened to be a hot summer afternoon, five years on). The bouquet is pure, complex and still has the youthful verve of a young wine, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of pear, brioche, almond paste, a lovely base of chalky soil tones and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and blossoming beautifully, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and classy finish. The Corbon family's wines are always

built to age long and gracefully and their 2002 is just starting to hit on all cylinders at age fourteen. 2016-2040+. **92+**.

**1996 Pierre Gimmonet Fils “Cuvée Gastronom” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Cuis)**

The 1996 vintage of Cuvée Gastronom from Pierre Gimmonet et Fils is a good solid example of the vintage that continues to drink well and shows no signs of structural degradation, but it is also a touch four-square in personality and not in the top division of 1996s. The bouquet offers up a fully mature mélange of baked pears and peaches, warm bread, chalky soil tones and hazelnuts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit chunky in profile, with a good core, fine *mousse* and good cut and grip on the solid finish. This still probably has a good decade of drinking ahead of it, but it is now fully mature. Not bad. 2016-2026. **88**.

**1996 Jacquesson “Avize” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Dizy)**

The 1996 Jacquesson “Avize” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime is a lovely example of the vintage, with brightness, bounce and lovely structural harmony still in evidence. The bouquet is vibrant and classy, offering up a constellation of apple, tangerine, warm bread, a complex base of chalky soil tones and a nice touch of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, frothy *mousse*, bright acids and fine length and grip on the elegant and well-balanced finish. This is a very tasty bottle at its peak, but with plenty of life ahead of it. 2016-2030+. **92**.

**1996 Pierre Moncuit “Cuvée Millésimé” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Mesnil-sur-Oger)**

The 1996 Pierre Moncuit “Cuvée Millésimé” Blanc de Blancs was one of those examples of the vintage that was getting a bit long in the tooth at age twenty and is in need of drinking up. The bouquet is quite mature, offering up notes of fallen apples, baked peaches, nutskin, orange peel and smoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and starting to fray a bit structurally, with zesty acids, tiring fruit, fleeting *mousse* in the glass and a short, fatiguing finish. This was probably quite tasty five or six years ago, but it is already sliding down the far side of its plateau. Drink up. 2016-2019. **86**.

**1996 Pierre Peters “Cuvée Spéciale” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Mesnil-sur-Oger)**

The 1996 1996 Pierre Peters “Cuvée Spéciale” Blanc de Blancs is a very good bottle that has stood the test of time quite well, but is now well into its peak of maturity and will be best drunk up over the next decade. The bouquet is deep and nicely mature, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, warm biscuits, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, plenty of smokiness and a spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused, with fine balance, sound *mousse* and a long, broad-shouldered finish that closes with fine complexity and grip. This is not the most elegant of Blanc de Blancs, but the wine is at its zenith and drinking with plenty of personality. 2016-2025+. **90+**.

**1996 Salon Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Mesnil-sur-Oger)**

I have had my share of oxidized vintages of Salon in the last decade, but this bottle of the 1996 was spot on and absolutely singing at our tasting and is one of the most exciting bottles of Salon I have tasted in years. The stunning nose soars from the glass in a blaze of pear, apple, fresh-baked bread, caraway seed, a complex base of chalky soil tones, fresh nutmeg and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, great mineral drive, refined *mousse* and simply stunning length and grip on the laser-like finish. Sheer brilliance. 2016-2040. **96**.



### **1996 Taittinger “Comtes de Champagne” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims)**

The 1996 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne has been a stunning example of the vintage since day one and at age twenty it is still not fully at its apogee of peak maturity. I had not tasted a bottle in five years and in the ensuing time the wine has started to really come into its own, with secondary layers of maturity starting to color the stunning bouquet of pear, delicious apple, brioche, complex, limestone minerality, toasted almond, orange zest, gentle smokiness and a lovely topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and utterly seamless, with its full-bodied format vivid and focused. The core is rock solid, the soil signature is exemplary and the finish is endless, electric and very complex. The wine is just now entering its plateau of maturity, where it should cruise along for decades and decades. One of the finest vintages of Comtes de Champagne I have ever had the pleasure to taste. 2016-2060. **98.**

### **1993 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Brut (Reims)**

It had been six years since I last had the pleasure to taste a bottle of the 1993 Comtes de Champagne and time seems to have simply not touched this wine since that day back in the summer of 2010 and it seems very likely that it will continue to cruise along at its apogee for at least a decade longer than I had thought back then. The wine has been fully mature for many years now, but continues to be fresh and lively on the palate, with its internal structure sound and seamless. The bouquet is pure, complex and *à point*, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of pear, *crème patissière*, toasted almond, chalky soil tones and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and still beautifully knit together, with bright acids, lovely focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, wide open and vibrant finish. Lovely wine. 2016-2035. **94.**

### **1982 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Brut (Reims)**

This particular bottle of the 1982 Comtes de Champagne was not one hundred percent pristine, but was probably at about ninety percent of what it should have been, as it was a fairly recent purchase from auction and seemed just a touch advanced. I only include the note here because the wine was still so superb that I have to imagine that perfectly-stored bottles are utterly sublime at the present time. Even in its slightly advanced state (evidenced by quite fleeting *mousse* on the palate and a notably darker than expected color) the wine was a fine, fine drink, offering up a deep and very complex nose of wizened apples, walnuts, caraway seed, a superb base of chalky soil tones and lovely upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with the remains of elegant *mousse*, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and vibrant finish. Perfect bottles have to have several more decades of life in them and rate at least five points higher! 2016-2025. **92.**

### ***Vintage-Dated Brut, Extra Brut and Brut Nature***

#### **2010 Jean-Marc Sélèque “Partition” Extra Brut (Pierry)**

**Disgorged June 2015**

The 2010 vintage of Partition from Monsieur Sélèque is composed of a blend of seventy-two percent chardonnay, fourteen percent each of pinot meunier and pinot noir, which as the back label observes, come from the same seven barrels each year, always taken from the same rows of vines “to create a harmony”. The 2010 version was finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. The wine is simply outstanding aromatically, offering up a refined constellation of pear, apple blossoms, complex chalky soil tones, a touch of almond paste and brioche. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a lovely core, frothy *mousse*, bright acids and lovely backend minerality on the long and very well-balanced finish. This is still

a young wine and I would tuck it away in the cellar for another three or four years and let it start to show some of its secondary layers of complexity and relax a bit more structurally. It will be a superb bottle. 2019-2035. **93**.

**2009 Georges Laval “Les Hautes Chèvres” Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature (Cumières)**

The 2009 is the last vintage of Les Hautes Chèvres to use the very old pinot noir vines that Vincent Laval has in this parcel, after which the old vines were replanted and the base of the cuvée moved to an equally venerable parcel of vines lower down the slope, but of pinot meunier, instead of pinot noir. This is still a young wine and in need of at least another good four or five years in the cellar to allow the wine to start to show some of its secondary elements. It will not reach its true apogee for at least another decade or more. The bouquet today is young and very, very promising, wafting from the glass in a blend of white peach, apple, *patissière*, a complex base of soil, dried flowers and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with elegant *mousse*, striking purity, excellent structure and grip and a long, nascently complex and utterly refined finish. 2020-2050+. **94+**.

**2009 Marie-Noëlle Ledru “Cuvée Goulté” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut**

I had not tasted a bottle of the superb 2009 Cuvée Goulté Blanc de Noirs from Madame Ledru since my last visit to her domaine in Ambonnay in the spring of 2015, so I was very happy to see a bottle pop up at a recent Champagne tasting that I attended. The wine is still quite youthful on both the nose and palate, but the balance is so impeccable, that it is also quite easy to enjoy in its zesty stage of adolescence. The gorgeous nose jumps from the glass in a mix of apple, white peach, stony minerality, *pâtisserie*, a touch of orange peel, dried flowers and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and laser-like, with a rock solid core, great mineral drive, nascent complexity, frothy *mousse* and a very long, snappy and perfectly balanced finish. 2019-2045. **94+**.

**2009 Louis Roederer Brut Nature (Reims)**

Philippe Starck is the French artist who collaborated on the packaging for the 2009 Brut Nature bottling from Louis Roederer. Monsieur Starck also collaborated on the initial release of Brut Nature from the house in the 2006 vintage. The wine is a blend of one-third chardonnay and two-thirds pinot noir and pinot meunier, with all of the grapes hailing from the village of Cumières. The *vins clairs* did not undergo malolactic fermentation, but one-third of the blend was barrel-fermented for this cuvée (which is down from fifty percent for the 2006 version). It spent five years aging *sur latte* and is non-*dosé*. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up a fine blend of apple, white peach, complex soil tones, a touch of pastry cream, gentle smokiness and a topnote of hazelnut. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and focused, with bright acids, frothy *mousse*, lovely complexity and grip and a long, poised and seamlessly balanced finish. The ripe fruit of the 2009 vintage provided the perfect *gras* for a non-*dosé* bottling, with the lack of malo delivering the customary structural integrity and grip one expects from a vintage-dated bottling from Louis Roederer. Fine, fine juice that is accessible today and should age very well indeed. 2016-2035+. **93+**.

**2009 Louis Roederer Brut Millésime (Reims)**

The 2009 Louis Roederer Brut Millésime is composed of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay and was aged a minimum of four years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. Eighteen percent of the *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented for this cuvée and the wine did not undergo malolactic fermentation. The bouquet shows off the ripe and sunny vintage to fine effect, wafting from the glass in a generous blend of peach, *patissière*, chalky soil tones, a

nice touch of almond and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a quite open personality, a fine core, pinpoint bubbles and lovely focus and grip on the long and vibrant finish. This is really a lovely example of the ripe and underrated 2009 vintage. The wine is drinking with great style at age seven, but clearly will cruise along nicely for another couple of decades. Fine juice. 2016-2035+. **92+**.

**2009 Louis Roederer “Cristal” Brut Millésime (Reims)**

The 2009 vintage of Cristal is composed of a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, with none of the *vins clairs* this year undergoing malolactic fermentation. Sixteen percent of the base wines were barrel-fermented this year and the wine was finished off with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet shows the generosity of fruit of this warm summer, but coupled with the classic Cristal sense of elegance, as it offers up scents of white peach, apple, *patissière*, beautifully complex, chalky minerality, a hint of almond and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and vibrant, with excellent mid-palate depth, utterly refined *mousse*, laser-like focus and excellent length and grip on the youthful and very complex finish. This is likely to reach its apogee earlier than many vintages of Cristal, given the Continental warmth of '09, but the wine is impeccably balanced and it will also age long and very gracefully. Just lovely. 2021-2050+. **96**.

**2008 Fumey-Tassin “Cuvée de Réserve” Brut Millésime (Celles sur Ource)**

The 2008 Fumey-Tassin Brut Millésime is composed of a blend of ninety percent pinot noir and ten percent pinot blanc. The wine offers up a youthfully complex bouquet of apple, white peach, warm bread, a fine base of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite brisk, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles and a long, primary and vibrant finish. This is still very early days for this bottle and a few more years in the cellar will allow it to blossom nicely. There is more complexity to come here, but the wine just needs a bit of bottle age. Good juice. 2018-2030. **90**.

**2008 Huré Frères “Instantanée” Extra Brut Millésime (Ludes)**

The 2008 Huré Frères “Instantanée” Brut Millésime is composed of a blend of thirty-five percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir and thirty percent pinot meunier. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The bouquet is young, pure and promising, offering up scents of apple, a touch of nuttiness, a complex base of soil, warm bread and a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a good core, fine nascent complexity, refined *mousse* and fine focus and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is not showing a great deal of elegance out of the blocks, but it is still early days for this wine and this trait may arrive with a bit of bottle age. 2016-2035. **91+?**

**2008 Camille Savès Grand Cru Brut Millésime (Bouzy)**

The 2008 Camille Savès Grand Cru Brut Millésime is the customary for this bottling, with the *cépages* being twenty percent chardonnay and eighty percent pinot noir (I reported the blend incorrectly for this cuvée in my last note on the wine). It was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter and delivers a superb bouquet of apple, a touch of tangerine, fresh-baked bread, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite racy in personality, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, minerally and nascently complex finish. Folks may look at the *dosage* of eight grams per liter and think this a tad generous, but remember, this wine does not undergo malolactic fermentation and a bit more buffering is needed for the acids. Lovely juice that really could use a few more years of bottle age to more completely blossom. 2019-2045. **93**.

### 2008 Camille Savès “Anaïs Jolicoeur” Grand Cru Brut Millésime (Bouzy)

The Anaïs Jolicoeur bottling is the top of the line from Champagne Savès, with the *vins clairs* for this cuvée barrel fermented in small casks. The *cépages* is slightly different than the regular Brut Millésime, with the blend including only ten percent chardonnay and all the rest being pinot noir, with the vineyard sources used for this wine exclusively from the family’s parcels in Bouzy. The 2008 version is outstanding, offering up a deep and pure bouquet of apple, white peach, a touch of fresh nutmeg, *patissière*, a complex base of soil tones and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in personality, with a superb core of fruit, refined *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and very classy finish. This wine is just starting to drink with generosity, but it will be very long-lived and there is no rush to open bottles! 2016-2040+. **93+**.



### 2007 Alexandre Filaine “Sensuum Vertigo” Brut Millésime (Damery)

Fabrice Gass has only produced one vintage-dated bottling to date in his career (though there is already a 2008 on its way), and his 2007 Sensuum Vertigo is truly an extraordinary bottle of bubbly. The blend on this wine is the same as the *cépages* for his non-vintage bottlings: forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot meunier. Additionally, Monsieur Gass ages this wine under cork for its time *sur latte*, rather than crown cap. The bouquet of the 2007 soars from the glass in a complex blend of pear, delicious apple, warm bread, gentle smokiness, a superbly complex base of soil and just a whisper of vanilla in

the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very classy, with a fine core of fruit, precise, pinpoint bubbles and outstanding length and grip on the complex and perfectly poised finish. This is still very early days for this fine wine, but it is already very hard not to want to drink it today! 2016-2045. **94+**.

**2007 Camille Savès Grand Cru Brut Millésime (Bouzy)**

The 2007 vintage-dated bottling from Camille Savès is more open and ready to go than its counterpart from 2008, and this is the vintage that I would be drinking now. The *cépages* is its traditional mix of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay and the *dosage* is again eight grams per liter. The bouquet is complex and wide open, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, orange zest, warm bread, stony minerality, gentle smokiness and a topnote of caraway seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and feline, with a good core, fine focus and grip, excellent complexity, refined *mousse* and a long, zesty and *à point* finish. A lovely bottle for drinking over the next twenty years. 2016-2035. **92**.

**2006 Pol Roger Brut Millésime (Épernay)**

The 2006 Pol Roger Brut Millésime is composed of a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay and was aged nine years *sur latte* prior to being finished off with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The wine today is drinking beautifully, offering up a deep and maturing bouquet of baked apple, caraway seed, lovely soil tones, warm bread, citrus peel and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the wide open and ready to go finish. This will not make old bones by the standards of this cuvée, but that is the nature of the '06 vintage, and for drinking over the next dozen years or so, there is an awful lot to like here! 2016-2030. **92**.

**2005 Ayala “Cuvée Perle d’Ayala” Grand Cru Brut Millésime (Aÿ) Disgorged Nov. 2013**

The 2005 vintage of Ayala’s *Tête de Cuvée*, “Cuvée Perle d’Ayala” is made up of a blend of eighty percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot noir. It has been a year since I last tasted this bottling and it continues to blossom beautifully. As I did not find the date of disgorgement (which is on the foil capsule) last year, I do not know if I am tasting the same disgorgement, but the wine is absolutely singing. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex mix of pear, apple, brioche, a fine signature of soil, fresh nutmeg, gentle smokiness, a dollop of sweet almond and gently musky floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and impeccably balanced, with a fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and very fine length and grip on the now wide open and elegant finish. What I really like about this cuvée is that Ayala ages it under cork, rather than crown cap, which gives the wine a textural polish on the palate that is most impressive. Fine, fine juice that is now into its apogee of peak drinkability, but shows plenty of potential for longer-term aging. High class juice. 2016-2035. **93+**.

**2005 Bollinger “La Grande Année” Brut Millésime (Aÿ) Disgorged November 2015**

As I mentioned last year, the 2005 vintage of Bollinger “La Grande Année” is composed of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay. All of the *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented and the 2005 was finished off with a *dosage* of six grams per liter after having spent nine and a half years on its fine lees. The wine is drinking very well at the present time, offering up a wide open and complex bouquet of apple, white peach, superb minerality, *patissière*, dried flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and a long, focused and *à point* finish. Like

many 2005s, this wine is now fully mature at age eleven and is drinking with great class, but probably will not be a true long-distance runner. 2016-2030. **92.**

**2004 Pol Roger “Cuvée Winston Churchill” Brut Millésime (Épernay)**

The 2004 Pol Roger “Cuvée Winston Churchill” is an outstanding young wine. It is a blend of old vine chardonnay and pinot noir, as Pol Roger stipulates that they will only use fruit for this bottling from grand cru vineyards that were planted during Churchill’s lifetime (he passed away in 1965). The wine was aged eleven years *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet of the 2004 offers up a deep and complex constellation of apple, just a whisper of tangerine, fresh-baked bread, gentle notes of hazelnut, a beautifully complex base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with bottomless depth at the core, utterly refined *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a very long, complex and elegant finish. This is quite open for a 2004, but with the impeccable balance to also age long and gracefully. Very high class juice. 2016-2040. **96.**

**2003 “La Matinale” Brut Nature Millésime- Champagne Tarlant (Disgorged June 2014)**

It had been nearly a year since I last had the pleasure to taste the 2003 La Matinale from Benoit Tarlant. As I mentioned last year, the wine is composed of a blend of forty-five percent pinot noir, twenty-seven percent pinot meunier and twenty-eight percent chardonnay, with no malo in this vintage. The wine is now wide open and really drinking with generosity, offering up a classy bouquet of apple, wheat toast, peach, a superb, minerally base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of almond. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and classy, with a fine core, impressive balance and complexity, elegant *mousse*, sound framing acids and a long, refined and *à point* finish. Based on this most recent bottle, I would guess that this wine will evolve a bit quicker than I initially thought, but for drinking over the next decade or so, there is a lot of pleasure to be had here! 2016-2025. **92.**

**2002 Bollinger “R. D.” Brut Millésime (Aÿ)**

The 2002 Bollinger R.D. is comprised of a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, with the wine being finished with a low *dosage* of 3.5 grams per liter. This is one of the most beautiful young vintages of R.D. that I have ever had the pleasure to taste, as the wine soars from glass in a blaze of apple, peach, *patissière*, a touch of hazelnut, beautifully complex soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and generous with pure fruit at the core, with utterly refined *mousse*, bright acids, lovely focus and grip and a very long, focused and complex finish. At age fourteen, this wine is nicely open for business and utterly charming, but it has the balance to also age long and very gracefully. A simply beautiful vintage of R.D. 2016-2040+. **95.**

**2002 Marie-Noëlle Ledru Extra Brut Millésime (Ambonnay)**

I had a chance to taste this bottle of 2002 vintage from Madame Ledru out in San Francisco as one of our warm up bottles before the 1985 northern Rhône tasting reported on in this issue. This was a lovely and quite *à point* bottle of bubbly, offering up a complex and nicely developed bouquet of peach, warm biscuits, lovely soil tones, a touch of walnut and an almost briny topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with refined *mousse*, impressive focus and bounce and a moderately long, complex and fairly relaxed structurally finish. The combination of the easy-going structure and the not overtly long finish made me wonder if this was not a completely pristine bottle. 2016-2025. **91.**





*Régis Camus, Managing Director of Champagne Piper-Heidsieck at a recent luncheon in New York.*

### **2002 Piper-Heidsieck “Rare” Brut Millésime (Reims)**

I reported on the 2002 Piper-Heidsieck Rare a year ago and time does not seem to have touched it at all over the last twelve months, for if anything, this particular bottle seemed even younger than last year’s! The wine beautifully synthesizes the ripe fruit of ’02 with great structural integrity and seems likely to drink at its peak for at least another twenty years. The bouquet is a pure, complex blend of apple, white peach, a touch of leanness, a great base of soil, fresh-baked bread, a touch of citrus peel and an overtly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and superbly detailed, with a fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and excellent backend mineral drive on the long, vibrant and very classy finish. 2016-2035+. **95.**

### **2002 Pol Roger Brut Millésime (Épernay)**

Whereas I had loved the 2002 Blanc de Blancs from Pol Roger the last time I tasted it, this most recent bottle of the 2002 Brut Millésime was not cruising at quite the same level. The wine has depth and complexity on the nose worthy of expectations, but the palate impression is a bit leesy and lacking in precision at the present time. I hope that this is just a moment of adolescent grumpiness. The bouquet is really first rate, offering up scents of apple, bread dough, fine minerality, lemon peel, a touch of quinine and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is a tad less interesting, albeit, full-bodied, crisp and nicely mineral. The *mousse* is customarily refined, there is good complexity, but for some reason the wine is quite defined by leanness on



the backend and really lacks a bit of focus. The raw materials here still merit a good score, but I do hope that the wine is just in a closed phase and will lose some of the yeasty qualities and snap precisely into focus with a bit more bottle age. If it does so, add three or four points. 2016-2040. **90.**

**2000 Ployez-Jacquemart “Liesse d’Harbonville” Brut Millésime (Ludes)**

The 2000 vintage of Ployez-Jacquemart’s “Liesse d’Harbonville” *Tête de Cuvée* is a superb example of this more forward vintage. As readers may recall, the *vins clairs* for this cuvée are all barrel-fermented, do not undergo malo and the wine is aged *sur latte* for a minimum of ten years prior to disgorgement. The bouquet offers up a gorgeous, maturing mix of apple, a touch of passion fruit, plenty of smokiness, a complex base of soil, toast and a dollop of orange blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, a fairly wide open structure and lovely bounce and grip on the focused and vibrant finish. This is a superb bottle that is at its apogee today, but clearly will continue on drinking at its peak of maturity for at least another decade. 2016-2026+. **94.**

**1999 Bollinger “R. D.” Brut Millésime (Aÿ) Served From Magnum**

The 1999 Bollinger “R. D.” is drinking very well indeed from magnum today, offering up a wide open and generous personality of complexity and breed. The bouquet is a maturing constellation of apple, walnuts, fresh-baked bread, an excellent base of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and absolutely *à point*, with a fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, lovely balance and grip and a quite long, complex and classy finish. Like most examples of the 1999 vintage, this will not make really old bones by the long-lived standards of this cuvée, but for drinking over the next twelve to fifteen years, there is a lot of pleasure to be had. 2016-2030. **92.**

**1996 Bollinger “Grande Année” Brut Millésime (Aÿ)**

The 1996 Bollinger “Grande Année” is now fully at its apogee, but is drinking beautifully and there is no immediate rush to drink it up, despite it now being wide open and wearing its heart on its sleeve. The deep and classically pinot-dominated bouquet of the ’96 is superb, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, white peach, rye bread, a touch of spice tones, a complex base of soil and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely broad-shouldered in personality, with excellent focus and grip, elegant *mousse*, very respectable mid-palate depth and a long, balanced and classy finish. If one were to be overly picky, perhaps the core is not quite as rock solid as the very best examples of the vintage, but this is a very small quibble with a delicious bottle of wine at its peak. 2016-2035. **92.**

**1996 Drappier “Grande Sendrée” Millésime (Urville)**

Having been very, very impressed by the quality of the 2008 Grande Sendrée Rosé from Drappier, I had very high expectations for this 1996 bottling. The wine is very good, but also quite evolved and perhaps will be best drunk up over the coming ten to twelve years. The nose shows quite a bit of maturity in its mélange of dried apple, pit fruit, nutskin, a touch of quinine, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and gently leesy finish. The 2008 Grande Sendrée Rosé is so precise and pure that I was hoping for the same from this ’96, but the wine seems just a bit blurry from its leesy tones on the backend, which may be a result of some

*battonage* during its *elevage*? It is still a very tasty wine in any case, but I was hoping for just a bit more. 2016-2035. **92.**

**1996 Lanson “Collection” Brut Millésime Magnum (Reims)**

**Disgorged June 2013**

The 1996 Lanson is composed of a blend of fifty-three percent pinot noir and forty-seven percent chardonnay, with this particular magnum spending sixteen years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement and preparation for the market. Enguerrand Baijot of Champagne Lanson was so kind to send us this magnum for inclusion in our tasting, as there was one left in their small stocks for events in New York. It was the eye opener of our tasting, as the wine showed brilliantly and caught many of the other attendees by surprise, as they were not expecting this wine to be able to vie with some of the biggest *Tête de Cuvées* from the vintage! The wine is pure, focused and still youthful (due to the non-malo house style at Lanson), offering up an absolutely superb bouquet of apple, orange zest, beautiful spice tones, a complex base of soil, bread dough and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with impeccable balance, a fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the complex and classy finish. This wine can still be special ordered from Lanson and it would make a marvelous addition to even the best-stocked cellar! 2016-2040+. **93.**

**1996 Dom Pérignon Brut- Moët et Chandon (Épernay)**

1996 is a marvelous vintage of Dom Pérignon and it was a great treat to be able to taste the original release versus the Oenotheque bottling side by side. The original release was disgorged many years ahead of the Oenotheque cuvée and is now starting to show the first vestiges of maturity, surging from the glass in a very refined and complex bouquet of apple, sweet quince, stony minerality, plenty of smokiness, bread dough and the first hints of the white truffles that will come in force with further bottle age. However, this wine has not yet moved into the aromatic sphere of fully mature Dom Pérignon, where the chardonnay element in the blend takes center stage, so this wine still has a long way to go. On the palate the wine is superb, with its full-bodied and complex format seamlessly balanced, with bright acids, pinpoint bubbles, a rock solid core and superb length and grip on the still fairly steely finish. At age twenty, the original release of 1996 Dom Pérignon is starting to really drink beautifully, but it is still not at its peak and I would try to hold off for at least another four or five years. It will be a very long-lived vintage of this wine and there really is no rush to drink it up while it is still climbing. 2020-2060. **95+.**

**1996 Dom Pérignon “Oenotheque” Brut- Moët et Chandon (Épernay)**

This was my first look at the 1996 Oenotheque release of Dom Pérignon, which of course is quite a bit behind the evolutionary arc of the original release of the wine. The bouquet is still fairly youthful and steely in profile, delivering a still primary nose of green apple, pear, a touch of menthol, great, stony minerality, the gentle botanicals of Dom Pérignon in its youth, bread dough and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, young and absolutely pristine, with laser-like focus, refined *mousse*, great backend mineral drive and a very long, focused and perfectly balanced young finish. This does not offer anywhere near the pleasure in the glass today as the original release, but it will be even finer once it has reached its apogee. 2028-2075+. **97.**



### **1995 Pol Roger “Cuvée Winston Churchill” Brut Millésime (Épernay)**

The 1995 vintage of Cuvée Winston Churchill is drinking at its apogee at age twenty-one and is really a lovely and high class example of the vintage. The bouquet offers up a vibrant and *à point* nose of apple, peach, fresh-baked bread, a complex base of minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a very long, perfectly balanced and zesty finish. Structurally, this wine has blossomed completely, but it still retains the bounce and depth of youth and is at a beautiful moment in its evolution. 2016-2030+. **94.**

### **1985 Jacquesson Brut Millésime (Dizy)**

**Disgorged 2011**

Jacquesson is making absolutely beautiful Champagne these days, but back in the 1980s, they were not on quite the same hot streak as they are today, and I would rate their wines back in this era in the “good, but not great camp”. This particular batch of their 1985 Brut Millésime had been bought by the Rare Wine Company way back in the day and just left aging *sur latte* in the Jacquesson cellars until it was disgorged and prepared for shipment to the US in 2011. The wine is drinking beautifully for its age, wafting from the glass in a complex and tertiary blend of baked apple, walnut, wheat toast, complex soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of honey. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and fully mature, with gentle structure, solid remaining *mousse* and sneaky length on the complex finish. This is now starting to get to the far side of its plateau, but is still quite tasty. 2016-2025. **89.**

### **1985 Dom Pérignon Brut- Moët et Chandon (Épernay)**

This was a fascinating bottle of the 1985 Dom Pérignon, as the bottle seemed slightly advanced, but retained lovely freshness to its *mousse* and plenty of bounce from sound acidity on the backend and just seemed to be projected ten years into the future in terms of evolution from what I was expecting. That said, I had not drunk a bottle of this in nearly six years and perhaps the wine has moved this much in terms of tertiary development over that time, but my gut instinct is that somehow, this bottle was a bit more forward than should be typical of the wine. The bouquet offers up a deep and complex blend of baked pears and peaches, chalky minerality, smoky overtones, a touch of pastry cream and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with the patina of full maturity, lovely *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty finish. Oddly, I greatly enjoyed this bottle, despite my feeling it was a bit advanced. 2016-2025. **92.**

### ***Vintage-Dated Rosé***

#### **2010 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé Millésime (Reims)**

I last tasted the 2010 vintage of Louis Roederer Brut Rosé Millésime in the early summer of 2015 and was very happy to see how the wine was evolving almost a year and a half later. This vintage is produced from its classic house blend of seventy percent pinot noir from the village of Cumières and thirty percent chardonnay from the village of Cuis (which adds a fine spine of acidity to the blend). The color on this bottling is still very pale and copper-salmon in hue, with the complex bouquet starting to blossom nicely and offering up a very elegant blend of tangerine, white cherries, a lovely base of limestone soil, fresh-baked bread, hints of the smokiness to come, gentle spice tones and orange blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is drinking with great style today, but is still a puppy and will be even better with some extended bottle age. 2016-2035. **93.**

#### **2008 Drappier “Grande Sendrée” Brut Rosé Millésime (Urville)**

The 2008 Drappier “Grande Sendrée” Brut Rosé is composed of a blend of ninety percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay. The wine is produced using only first pressing juice, with the *saignée* method utilized with a three day maceration for the pinot noir, before the chardonnay is added. The 2008 was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter and was aged six years *sur latte*. The bouquet is outstanding, offering up a superb synthesis of delicacy and complexity in its constellation of wild strawberries, white cherries, wheat toast, dried rose petals, a lovely base of chalky soil and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and excellent focus and grip on the very, very long and youthfully zesty finish. Very refined juice that will only improve with further bottle age. 2016-2035. **94.**

#### **2008 Pol Roger Brut Rosé (Épernay)**

Readers may recall that I absolutely loved the 2006 vintage of Pol Roger Brut Rosé, and the 2008 version is an outstanding follow-up to that excellent wine. The *cépages* of the '08 includes a touch more chardonnay than the '06, with the blend being sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay. The wine includes fifteen percent still pinot noir and was aged seven years *sur latte*, prior to disgorgement. The utterly refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, tangerine, chalky soil tones, brioche, a touch of clove-like spices and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and racy, with a superb core, elegant

*mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. Not surprisingly, this is a bit more tightly-knit out of the blocks than the 2006 version, but has outstanding depth and should prove to be every bit as exceptional with a bit of bottle age. This is not to say that the wine is not eminently drinkable today, but it is still climbing and will be even better with a bit of bottle age. 2019-2035+. **93.**

**2007 Piper-Heidsieck “Rare” Brut Rosé Millésime (Reims)**

The very first vintage ever produced of Piper-Heidsieck “Rare” Rosé hails from the 2007 vintage and the wine is stunning. The wine is comprised of a blend of fifty-six percent chardonnay and forty-four percent pinot noir, with “a significant percentage of the pinot noir still wine” says *Chef de Cave* Régis Camus. The wine was aged *sur latte* for eight years prior to disgorgement and is just being released into the market this October. The color is a beautiful salmon hue, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a focused and beautifully crystalline blend of blood orange, rye bread, a truly complex base of minerality, delicate spice tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly refined, with pinpoint bubbles, excellent mid-palate depth, bright acids and superb focus and grip on the very long and elegant finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Rosé. 2016-2035+. **95.**

**2006 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Brut Rosé (Reims)**

The 2006 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Rosé is comprised of a blend this year of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay. Of the seventy percent pinot noir, twelve percent of this is still red wine, all hailing from the village of Bouzy. The wine is pure and classy on both the nose and palate, with the utterly refined bouquet wafting from the glass in a blend of cherries, blood orange, chalky minerality, a touch of clove-like spice tones, dried rose petals, rye bread and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off superb mid-palate depth, with elegant *mousse*, bright acids and laser-like focus on the long and superbly complex finish. This is drinking beautifully today, but will have no difficulty aging long and gracefully as well. 2016-2040+. **95.**

**2005 Bollinger “La Grande Année” Brut Rosé Millésime (Aÿ)**

**Disgorged July 2015**

The 2005 Bollinger “La Grande Année” Brut Rosé was aged nine and a half years *sur latte* in the maison’s cellars in Aÿ. The wine is composed of a similar blend to the 2004, which is seventy-two percent pinot noir and twenty-eight percent chardonnay, with five percent of the pinot noir in the blend still wine from the *Maison’s* vines in Aÿ. The 2005 was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter and offers up a superb bouquet of cherries, blood orange, lovely, discreet spice tones, a great base of soil, caraway seed, orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with great focus and complexity, refined *mousse*, bright acids and superb balance and grip on the long, classy finish. This is a stellar follow-up to the brilliant 2004 version! 2016-2030+. **94.**

**2000 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Brut Rosé**

Taittinger’s 2000 Comtes de Champagne Rosé is drinking beautifully at age sixteen and is at its apogee of peak maturity. The bouquet is deep, pure and marvelously complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of tangerine, cherry skin, rye bread, a complex base of chalky soil tones, dried flowers, a touch of clove and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and seamless, with a superb core of fruit, very refined *mousse*, impeccable balance and a very long, complex and vibrant finish. I love Comtes de Champagne Rosé from the moment that it is released, but it seems like it really hits one of its sweet spots in its evolution around age fifteen! 2016-2045. **95.**

**1996 L. Aubry Fils “Sable” Brut Rosé- Nicolas François Aubry (Jouy-lès-Reims)**

The 1996 Sable Rosé from Champagne Aubry is one of the most unique examples of this style that I have seen, for at age twenty, all of the color was gone from the wine and if the label had not stated Rosé, I would have never known its identity. Of course, the wine was bottled in clear glass, which may explain its tint fading away. Surprisingly, despite the wine looking old, it still had some life in it and was not a bad drink. The bouquet is still quite lively, offering up scents of apple, tart orange, a touch of brininess, smoke and soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and moderately complex, with frothy *mousse*, sound acids and pretty good balance on the sneaky finish. Not a great wine, but still a good wine with some years of life in it. 2016-2023. **87.**



## THE 2015 BEAUJOLAIS VINTAGE ADDENDUM



*Summer vines in the fine Fleurie lieu à dit of La Madone.*

As I noted in my article on the 2015 Beaujolais vintage in the last issue, the style of this exceptional vintage has demanded a bit more aging in the cellars for many of the wines, so that their pace of release is a bit slower than in a typical vintage. Consequently, more 2015s continue to arrive here in New York and I am trying to taste them as they are released onto the market, to give a broader blanket of coverage to this important year. As I wrote about in Issue 63, the summer of 2015 was a very hot year and the wines produced from this growing season are rich, powerful and often quite stunning. Xavier Barbet, whose family owns Domaine des Billards in St. Amour and a handful of other top estates, commented that “2015 is really an exceptional vintage, like 1976 and 1947, but not as regular in quality as one might have expected.” The slightly heterogeneous nature of the vintage can probably be traced to a couple of factors, as the heat of midsummer in this year caused some instances of hydric stress and some parcels of vines shut down, so that maturation was not always smooth during the strongest heat of the summer. Additionally, the high sugar levels of many of the wines presented their own challenges when it came to fermentation. On this count, Monsieur Barbet noted that “the high sugars necessitated careful and cool fermentations, often with partial or complete destemming” and it was very important to be gentle in the cellars if one wanted to capture the full potential of the 2015 vintage. Not everyone has succeeded as a result of the complexities presented by this hot growing season, but those who have excelled have made some absolutely legendary wines.



As I mentioned in my last article on the vintage, one of the striking aspects of 2015 is just how wide a swing in alcohol levels one can find amongst various bottlings, which probably finds its genesis in the period of maturation blockage in the heat of the summer. As August moved forward, growers were faced with tannins that needed ripening, and where the vines had shut down a bit in those blistering midsummer days, it was often necessary to let the sugars climb higher to allow the tannins to ripen up a bit more as September arrived. While I have heard reports of wines above sixteen percent alcohol in this vintage, I have not tasted any of these, but I have probably tasted some wines in the fifteen percent region. Others that I have tried have been at thirteen or thirteen and a half percent alcohol, so this demonstrates just how wide a range one could have depending on the age of the vines, the style of the underlying soils and the ability of root systems to navigate in search of nurturing water during the peak of the midsummer heat. Where the vines were able to keep the maturation process going during the highest temperatures, the tannins ripened progressively and *vignerons* were able to bring in their grapes at good ripeness levels, without having to be faced with very high sugar levels if they were forced to allow the bunches to hang on into September in the hopes of ripening up the tannins a bit more. Where the tannins were lagging from the weather in July, one simply had to allow the sugars to climb, while waiting for the tannins to play catch up at the backend of the growing season. It was a very similar set of circumstances in Bordeaux in 2010 that produced so many very high octane and questionably balanced wines. Happily, most of what I have tasted from the Beaujolais region in 2015 has not exhibited any balance problems, with even the higher octane wines still in the fourteens, rather than the fifteen-plus alcohol range, and I have been very impressed by the vast majority of 2015 Beaujolais that I have tasted thus far.

As the lineup of wines below will attest, there remains quite a large number of 2015s that have not yet been released from their producers' cellars. I attribute this to the notable tannic structures that many wines from the vintage possess, which has encouraged *vignerons* to simply extend the *elevage* of the wines for several more months to allow the wines to harmoniously come into balance prior to bottling. I anticipate doing another report on the 2015 Beaujolais early next year to cover more of the later-released wines, as several of my favorite producers in the region, such as Jean-Paul Brun or Château Grange Cochard have not yet shipped any of their 2015s to New York, while others, such as Pierre-Marie Chermette at Domaine du Vissoux, have only shipped a portion of their 2015s, while other cuvées continue to rest comfortably in the domaine's cellars. In the meantime, there are still plenty of very strong 2014s out there as well, and I have received several recent releases from that vintage as well which are reviewed below. Of particular note of new releases from the 2014 vintage are the superb single vineyard bottlings from Morgon and Moulin-à-Vent from Louis Jadot's Château des Jacques, which are absolutely exceptional long-distance runners in the making. Of course, as I drink a fair amount of Beaujolais over the course of each month, there are a few notes on vintages other than 2015 and 2014 that are also included in this report. Since the 2005 vintage, Beaujolais lovers have never been presented with such a string of successful vintages and there has been an awful lot of very high quality wines available in the market over the last decade or so. Many thanks again to Carrie Marchal for sharing some of her lovely photographs of the Beaujolais region for inclusion in this report- they are far nicer than the ones I have been able to snap during my winter visits to the region over the years! The following wines are arranged in their customary fashion, with Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages first, followed by the Crus in geographic fashion.

### ***Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages***

#### **2014 Beaujolais-Villages- Domaine Stéphane Aviron**

The 2014 Beaujolais-Villages from Stéphane Aviron is a classic example of the vintage, showing a nice touch of weediness in its aromatic constellation of cherries, red berries, fresh herbs, a touch of nutskin and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and shows a touch of baked fruit tones that I assume came from the heat spike at the tail end of the growing season. The core is excellent and the wine shows bright acids, good focus and fine length and grip on the finish. This is an example of Beaujolais-Villages that has loads of personality and vitality on the backend, but it also has a touch of the less desirable characteristics of the vintage as well (baked fruit and a touch of weediness). If one does not like any signs of pyrazines in their wines, steer clear, but if that dollop of weediness is not a problem for you, then this is a very serious example of Beaujolais-Villages. 2016-2025. **88.**

### ***Saint-Amour***

#### **2013 St. Amour- Domaine des Billards**

The 2013 Domaine des Billards St. Amour is blossoming beautifully and the year that has passed since I last tasted it has treated it very well. The bouquet remains youthful and will deliver another layer of complexity with further bottle age, but it is highly attractive in its current guise of black cherries, black plums, gamebird, dark soil tones, fresh herb tones, gentle nuttiness and a dollop of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and nicely sappy at the core, with a full-bodied format, tangy acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex finish. There is a touch of fresh herb flavors on the backend today, which is typical of many of the 2013s, but I really like the balance and style of this classy wine. 2016-2035. **92.**

### ***Chénas***

#### **2014 Chénas “Vieilles Vignes”- Stéphane Aviron**

As I noted a year ago, the Chénas bottling from Stéphane Aviron is produced from a parcel of one hundred year-old vines. 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 2014 version is really outstanding, jumping from the glass in a blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, a touch of blood orange, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, lovely soil tones that will turn autumnal in due course, just a whisper of peppercorn and a topnote of acorn. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with excellent focus and mid-palate intensity, superb balance and a very long, energetic and complex finish. This is really an outstanding bottle of high-toned Chénas, with the balance to age quite gracefully. 2016-2030. **92.**

### ***Chiroubles***

#### **2015 Chiroubles “Chatenay”- Daniel Bouland**

The 2015 Chiroubles “Chatenay” from Daniel Bouland is a beautifully sappy and vibrant example of this ripe vintage, jumping from the glass in a pure and exuberant bouquet of black cherries, sweet cranberries, spit-roasted gamebird, dark soil tones, a bit of bonfire and a gentle topnote of sweet herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and a touch chewy, with a sappy core of fruit, bright acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long, modestly tannic and superb finish. This is 13.5 percent octane on the label and this seems on the money. Another absolutely terrific bottle of 2015 Beaujolais that is delicious now, but like so many of the top wines of the vintage, this will last for many, many years. 2016-2035. **93.**

## ***Juliénas***

### **2014 Juliénas- Domaine de la Conseillère (J. J. Vincent)**

The Domaine de la Conseillère in Juliénas was purchased by the Château de Fuissé (of Pouilly-Fuissé fame) back in 2009. The wine is made from hand-harvested grapes and raised entirely in stainless steel. The 2014 version is really beautiful, soaring from the glass in a gently sappy and quite complex blend of red and black cherries, a touch of orange peel, an exotic spice tones redolent of cumin and cardamom, rose petals, a fine base of soil tones and a bit of distant smoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full, tangy and beautifully balanced, with a good core, impressive focus and balance and a long, vibrant and intensely flavored finish. This is really a beautifully made bottle of Juliénas. 2016-2023. **92.**

## ***Moulin-à-Vent***

### **2015 Moulin-à-Vent “Les Trois Roches”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)**

The 2015 Moulin-à-Vent “Les Trois Roches” from Domaine du Vissoux is another absolutely stellar example of the vintage from Pierre-Marie Chermette, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and offering up all of the depth and intensity of the vintage, without sacrificing any of the customary Vissoux precision and purity. The stunning nose is youthful, but oh, so promising, as it delivers scents of sweet cassis, black cherries, espresso, violets, dark soil tones, a touch of licorice, gamebird, woodsmoke and lead pencil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and seamlessly balanced, with ripe tannins, laser-like focus, a superb core and a very, very long, soil-driven and still quite youthful finish. If one wanted a prime example of a 2015 that might replicate the longevity of the finest 1947s, this would be it, as it has stunning concentration, tied to impeccable balance and plenty of structural integrity. 2022-2075. **96.**

### **2014 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes”- Stéphane Aviron**

As I mentioned last year, Stéphane 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, with the wine fermented in stainless steel and raised in a combination of newer and older Burgundy barrels. The 2014 version of his Moulin-à-Vent is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex aromatic blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, chicory, a touch of peppercorn, a fine base of dark soil tones, fresh thyme and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured, with a fine core of black fruit, a firm base of tannin, excellent focus and grip and a long, tangy and still quite primary finish. This needs a bit of bottle age to start to blossom, but will be absolutely outstanding example of Moulin-à-Vent with sufficient age. 2018-2040+. **92+.**

### **2014 Moulin-à-Vent “La Roche”- Château des Jacques**

The 2014 Moulin-à-Vent “La Roche” from Château des Jacques is just outstanding, though it will need a bit of bottle age to start to drink with proper generosity. The bouquet is pure, nascently complex and very classy, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, a touch of chicory, gamebird, espresso and a complex base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven in personality, with a fine core of black fruit, moderate, ripe tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, promising and very well-balanced finish. 2019-2045+. **93.**



*The windmill from which Moulin-à-Vent takes its name; Château des Jacques' La Roche parcel in the foreground.*

#### **2014 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos de Grand Carquelin”- Château des Jacques**

The 2014 vintage of Clos de Grand Carquelin from Château des Jacques is a bit more structured and reserved in personality than the La Roche bottling, but equally promising. The wine offers up a youthful aromatic constellation of cassis, woodsmoke, espresso, a bit of *pigeon*, dark soil and fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely transparent in personality, with ripe tannins, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the vibrant, but still youthful finish. This will be excellent in due course. 2021-2050. **93+**.

#### **2014 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos de Rocheigrès”- Château des Jacques**

The Clos de Rocheigrès from Château des Jacques lies on the Moulin-à-Vent-Fleurie border, not far from the Coudert family's Clos de la Roilette, with the soil here including a bit of pink sandstone over its granitic base, which tends to give the fruit tones a bit more plumpness out of the blocks than the other Moulin-à-Vent single vineyard bottlings from the estate. The 2014 Clos de Rocheigrès is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a complex aromatic blend of black cherries, dark berries, chicory, a touch of venison, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke, pepper and hints of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with moderate, suave tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, soil-driven and very classy finish. This really does show a touch of Fleurie-Moulin-à-Vent hybrid elements,

but this is all to the good and the wine is going to be simply outstanding when it reaches full maturity. 2020-2050. **93.**

### ***Fleurie***

#### **2015 Fleurie “Poncié”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)**

The 2015 Poncié from Pierre-Marie Chermette’s Domaine du Vissoux is a superb follow-up to the brilliant 2014 bottling of this wine. The bouquet is deep, very, very pure and shows a nice touch of sappiness in its aromatic constellation of black cherries, pomegranate, intense violets, bitter chocolate, a fine base of dark soil tones, fresh thyme, a hint of cedar and a topnote of spit-roasted gamebirds. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and hauntingly well-balanced, with tangy acids, a fair bit of tannin (particularly for a young Fleurie), lovely mid-palate concentration and superb intensity of flavor on the very, very long and minerally finish. I loved the 2014 Poncié, but this seems likely, with sufficient bottle age, to be even better! 2020-2045+. **94+.**

#### **2014 Fleurie- Domaine de la Madrière (Stéphane Aviron)**

Stéphane Aviron’s Fleurie hails from the Domaine de la Madrière, whose steep hillside vineyards are located on the western side of the appellation, in the direction of Chiroubles. As I noted last year, 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 2014 Fleurie is again a bit reductive out of the blocks (as was the case with the 2013 version), but with a bit of air eventually blossoms to offer up scents of cherries, cranberries, fresh herbs, woodsmoke, a hint of cocoa powder and a really classy base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely sappy at the core, with a nice touch of *herbacité* adding complexity on the backend, with bright acids, impeccable balance and lovely soil signature adding up to a classy example of the 2014 vintage. It is quite impressive how this wine blossoms with some air and it will clearly age gracefully, but if you are inclined to drink it on the young side, then decant it prior to serving! 2016-2030. **91.**

### ***Morgon***

#### **2015 Morgon “Bellevue” Schiste- Daniel Bouland**

The 2015 Morgon “Bellevue” from Daniel Bouland comes in at a reported 14.5 percent alcohol and this seems spot on for this wine. The bouquet shows a nice baked fruit element (a bit like 1982 Bordeaux), but is also quite vibrant, offering up scents of black cherries, black plums, a bit of dark chocolate, a touch of fresh rosemary, bonfires, gentle balsamic tones and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very vibrant, with a sappy core of fruit, ripe, chewy tannins, lovely backend soil drive and a very long, ripe, but also very well-balanced finish. This is very impressive in its ability to deliver vibrancy and freshness at a very high level, despite its being plenty ripe. It is far more pure than a corresponding 2009 for example! Fine juice that again, seems like it could really go the distance in the cellar, but it will need some time in the cellar for the tannins to recede a touch. 2020-2050. **93.**

#### **2015 Morgon “Delys”- Daniel Bouland**

These great old vines are getting very close to their ninetieth vintage, as they were planted in 1926. This wine is also listed at 14.5 octane, but seems like it might be just a touch higher to my palate. The bouquet is deep, black fruity and ripe, delivering a fine blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, roasted gamebird, a touch of *garrigue*, dark soil tones

and a hint of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, sappy and rock solid at the core, with firm, slightly coarse tannins, fine focus and grip and a very long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This has almost bottomless depth and stunning length on the backend, and it may well be a legend in the making that will need a decade of bottle age to blossom completely. It is more hunkered down out of the blocks than the Bellevue, and though it is hard to get a precise read on out of the blocks, I would be willing to bet it will ultimately be a great bottle of Morgon. 2023-2050+. **90-94?**

**2015 Morgon “Corcelette” Vieilles Vignes- Daniel Bouland**

The 2015 Morgon “Corcelette” Vieilles Vignes from Daniel Bouland is just a touch lower in octane than the Bellevue and Delys bottlings, coming in at 14.3 percent alcohol and the wine is stunning! The nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of sappy black cherries, sweet dark berries, balsamic tones, rosemary, fire pit, roasted meats, dark soil tones and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and impressively light on its feet for 2015, with great density at the core, superb soil signature, firm, ripe tannins and a very long, focused and still very young finish. This is as youthfully structured as the Delys, but it is more transparent out of the blocks and here, the ultimate greatness of the wine seems assured, it is only a matter of patience to let it hibernate long enough in the cellar for the wine to blossom fully. Great juice. 2023-2060. **94+**.

**2014 Morgon “Côte du Py” Vieilles Vignes- Stéphane Aviron**

The 2014 Morgon “Côte du Py” Vieilles Vignes from Stéphane Aviron offers up a lovely, complex bouquet that shows just a touch of baked fruit character (in the manner of 1982 Bordeaux) in its classy blend of cherries, red plums, a fine base of granitic soil tones, a touch of fresh herbs, orange peel, dried rose petals and a nice topnote of spices. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and soil-driven, with a fine core of red fruit, lovely focus and grip, a touch of backend tannin and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is a fine bottle of young Côte du Py, which is approachable today, but will be even better with a few years of bottle age. 2016-2035. **92.**

**2014 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Château Grange Cochard**

The 2014 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes” from Château Grange Cochard is a lovely example of the vintage, with a very classically pure and gently leafy personality on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is deep, pure and quite complex out of the blocks, offering up scents of sweet dark berries, black cherries, spit-roasted gamebird, chicory, dark soil tones, pepper and a discreetly autumnal topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, nicely balance and youthfully peppery out of the blocks, with a good core, bright acids and a bit of backend tannin on the long finish that will carry the wine nicely into the future. This wine was tasted after a rather stellar lineup of 2015 Crus and it had no problem holding its own, though it does take a few minutes to reacquaint one’s palate with the more traditional aromatic profile and structure of a 2014 Morgon, after the depth of the 2015s! 2016-2035+. **92.**

**2014 Morgon- Château des Jacques**

Château des Jacques’ straight 2014 Morgon bottling is simply outstanding and really makes me look forward to tasting the single vineyard bottlings from this vintage! The bouquet is deep, pure and nicely transparent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, vinesmoke, a touch of fresh herbs, granitic minerality and just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very soil-driven, with a lovely core, impeccable focus and balance, just a bit of backend tannin and lovely purity on the long, youthful and tangy

finish. This is approachable out of the blocks, but will be even better with a few years' worth of bottle age to allow its secondary layers to emerge. 2018-2045+. **92.**

**2014 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château des Jacques**

The 2014 Côte du Py from Château des Jacques is deeper and more sappy at the core than the regular Morgon bottling, offering up an excellent bouquet of cassis, black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebirds, granitic minerality, a touch of pepper and a gentle topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and focused, with a sappy core, fairly substantial, well-integrated tannins and outstanding backend energy on the long and very well-balanced finish. Not surprisingly, this will need more time than the regular Morgon to blossom, but it is going to be simply outstanding and a serious long-distance runner. 2022-2060. **94.**

**2012 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château Grange Cochard**

The 2012 Morgon “Côte du Py” from Château Grange Cochard is blossoming very nicely, with a lovely depth of sappy black cherry fruit carrying the overtly herbal touches of the vintage. The bouquet is bright, complex and quite classy, offering up scents of black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of green peppercorn, dark soil, gamebirds, incipient notes of forest floor and a touch of turmeric in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and focused, with good depth at the core, lovely balance and a long, complex and tangy finish. The 2012 vintage in Beaujolais is a tad herbal in personality, and there is a touch of this here, but at the same time, there is breed, complexity and pure fruit and it is really not all that hard to drink this wine in its present state of evolution. There is still a bit of backend tannin and the wine will continue to age nicely, and my gut feeling is that the touch of *herbacité* will evolve in an interesting direction and the wine will be even better with a bit more bottle age. 2016-2030. **89+.**

***Brouilly***

**2015 Brouilly “Pierreux”- Domaine du Vissoux (Pierre-Marie Chermette)**

As I have mentioned in the past, the Brouilly “Pierreux” bottling from Pierre-Marie Chermette hails from the southern part of Brouilly appellation, just to the east of the village of Odenas, and often this wine has more in common with bottlings of Côte de Brouilly as a result. The 2015 Pierreux is fairly low octane for the vintage, coming in at 13.5 percent, but offering plenty of depth and structure, which are the hallmarks of this year. The complex bouquet is a bit more black fruity out of the blocks than the 2014 was at a similar age, offering up scents of black cherries, pomegranate, a striking base of soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh rosemary, chicory and a nice touch of meatiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and laser-like in its focus, with a rock solid core, some firm, well-integrated tannins and superb soil drive on the very long and youthful finish. This is going to be a stunning bottle of Brouilly, but, like many of the very best 2015s, it is going to want some time in the cellar. 2019-2045+. **93+.**

***Côte de Brouilly***

**2015 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Mélanie”- Daniel Bouland**

Daniel Bouland’s 2015 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Mélanie” is a bit riper than his beautiful Chiroubles, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol on the label this year. However, the wine shows no signs of *sur maturité* on the nose, jumping from the glass in a sappy mélange of black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of grilled meats, woodsmoke, dark chocolate, a dollop of fresh herbs, a good base of soil, just a hint of the autumn leaves to come and a bit of cedar in the upper register (this is barrel-fermented). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and flamboyantly sappy at



the core, with firm, ripe tannins, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the moderately heady finish. This seems higher than 14.5 percent to my palate, as there is a bit of overt heat poking out on the backend right now, but at the same time, the acids are bright and the wine is impressively pure for its octane level and really does not seem overripe. This has the chassis to age for decades and decades, and if it can carry its octane over the long haul, then it will be a magical wine. I have no experience with aging Cru Beaujolais at this level of alcohol for the very long haul, but I am inclined to be that this wine will age like a '47! 2016-2040+. **92.**

**2014 Côte de Brouilly “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Stéphane Aviron**

Stéphane Aviron's 2014 Côte de Brouilly is a lovely, red fruity example of this commune, but with that touch of baked fruit on the nose that is reminiscent of the '82 Bordeaux. The bouquet is deep, complex and still fairly primary in its constellation of backed cherries and quince, lovely and quite complex soil tones, a touch of nutskin, gentle spice elements, gamebird, a touch of peppercorn and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and youthful, with a fine core, lovely transparency, tangy acids and impressive intensity of flavor on the very long, palate-staining and very promising finish. Just a classic example of red fruity and soil-driven Côte de Brouilly! This is eminently approachable and tasty today, but it is really built to age and will be even better with a few years' worth of bottle age. 2016-2030. **92.**

## A NICE HANDFUL OF 2013 CÔTE-RÔTIE CLASSICISTS



The 2013 vintage is absolutely outstanding in Côte-Rôtie and will be one day regarded as one of the modern day classics and spoken of with the same reverential tones that one today reserves for the 1988 or 1991 vintage in the region. Strictly through good fortune, I had the opportunity to taste through the 2013s from three of my favorite classicists in the appellation, Domaine Barge, Domaine Champet and Domaine Rostaing, to get a window into the potential of this great vintage. Readers will recall that over the course of the last year or so, I have written domaine profiles on the all three of these great historic estates, so when Mannie Berk of The Rare Wine Company wrote to ask me if I would like to taste the 2013 La Viallière from Domaine Champet, I of course replied in the affirmative! During our conversation, he asked if I had yet tasted the 2013s from Domaine Gilles Barge, and when I replied that I had not yet seen the wines, he dropped a note to their New York importer, Bradley Cohen, to see if he would send me samples of their four bottlings of Côte-Rôtie, as this is the first vintage where the Barge family has added a single vineyard bottling of Côte Blonde to their lineup. Once Bradley had kindly agreed to send samples of the 2013 Barge wines, I circled back to Mannie Berk to see if they still had the 2013s from René Rostaing in house, as I thought it would be great to compare all three estates' 2013s side by side and really get a feel for how the classicists of Côte-Rôtie have done in

this outstanding vintage. What followed was the most exciting tasting of young Côte-Rôtie that I have been fortunate to enjoy since the release of the 1991s all those years ago!

The 2013 vintage in Côte-Rôtie is a great classic that does not fit the mold of many of the other recent vintages that have received abundant praise in the northern Rhône in recent times, as this is not a powerfully ripe year like 2010, but rather a supremely pure, transparent and concentrated vintage of structured wines that will take many years to truly blossom, but which promise to be absolutely dazzling at their peaks. The spring was not particularly auspicious, as the weather was cool and this got the growing season out of the blocks late, May was unbelievably rainy and flowering was not particularly fitful in early June. The rest of the month of June was not much of an improvement, causing mildew problems for *vignerons* and by the end of the month, not too many people were anticipating a great vintage. However, most *vignerons* often note that the first half of each growing season is more about quantity than quality, and as the weather turned better in July, the potential of the vintage started to inch upwards. However, unlike years such as 2009 or 2010, the back half of the summer of 2013 was not scorchingly hot, with the sunny days coupled with cooler, clear nights, so that sugars mounted fairly slowly and acidities stayed very high. At the end of August sugar accumulation was definitely lagging in the bunches, as the combination of the late start to the season, brought about by the cold and inclement spring, coupled with lower than average temperatures in the sunny days of July and August meant that a great “Indian Summer” was going to be needed in September to get the crop up to proper ripeness levels. Happily, this is exactly what producers in the northern Rhône received, as September’s weather was beautiful (though still not particularly hot) and sugars marched resolutely upwards over the course of the month, allowing for picking to get started at the very end of September or during the first week of October for producers in Côte-Rôtie.

The window for harvesting was very small in 2013, as it rained fairly heavily around the 28<sup>th</sup> of September, just as the grapes were nearing the finish line of sugar accumulation, which got everyone out in the vines to start bringing in their fruit. The picking weather was okay in early October, with occasional showers, but not enough to really affect the crop adversely, but a second round of even heavier rainfall came in to the region mid-month. Growers essentially needed to get their fruit all in prior to the mid-month rains, which began on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October and were pretty relentless from that point forward, so it was a vintage where producers whose predilections are to let the grapes hang and get more potential alcohol did not have this option in 2013. However, if the spring had not been so cold and the flowering so erratic in early June, causing a short crop, then the vintage of 2013 would probably never have managed to get across the finish line to full ripeness, as a larger crop load would simply have not ripened up fully in the sunny days of September, given how far behind the grapes were at the end of August. So Mother Nature has to be credited, through her draconian methods of the spring and early summer, in producing such a truly superb vintage in 2013. The 2013 Côte-Rôties have outstanding depth and purity of fruit, coupled to firm chassis of tannin and outstanding transparency, and in the fullness of time, this is going to prove to be one of the most outstanding vintages of the last twenty years in the region. To my palate, it towers over the far riper and more powerful years of 2009 and 2010 in the region, as there is simply no issue with high alcohol or overripe flavors in the 2013s. Many of the wines I tasted were in the 12.5 or thirteen percent range, which used to be standard in great vintages in Côte-Rôtie back in the 1980s, but these days, is very rare when the wines are

as complete as are these superb 2013s. The wines have more depth and stuffing than the very pretty 2012s, which I am also very fond of for Côte-Rôtie, as well as more tannin, and out of the blocks, the 2013 vintage here reminds me very, very strongly of the young 1991s. So, make a point of searching out some of these beautiful wines if you can, as they will be legends down the road.

*Of the following notes, I have tried to group them by similarity of terroir, rather than strictly alphabetically by producer, as I think it is more interesting to compare the tasting notes on each wine alongside that of similarly styled terroirs from other top producers. I have also appended a note on the 2011 wine from Domaine Ogier, as the 2013 was not available from their importer, but they offered a bottle of the 2011 and I would have been rather dumb to say no to that offer, particularly I had not yet had an opportunity to taste the wine previously!*

### **2013 Côte-Rôtie Classicists**

#### **2013 Côte-Rôtie “Cuvée du Plessy”- Domaine Gilles Barge**

The 2013 Cuvée du Plessy from the Barge family is an outstanding young bottle of Côte-Rôtie, offering up a classic *Côte de Blonde* aromatic profile, coupled to the cooler, black fruity tones of this late vintage, offering up notes of cassis, pepper, beautifully complex soil tones, a touch of youthful stems, gamebird and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and intensely flavored, with a good core, superb soil signature, moderate, suave tannins, good acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and very transparent finish. This wine is only 12.5 percent octane and is very classical in profile, promising excellent evolution in bottle, but with a structure that will also allow the wine to be drunk in its charming youth. 2020-2050. **92.**

#### **2013 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Corinne, Jean-Paul et Loïc Jamet**

The Jamet brothers, Jean-Luc and Jean-Paul, decided to go their separate ways in the 2013 vintage, creating two distinct estates by splitting the family’s vineyard production. They had worked side by side since the late 1980s and co-directed the family property since their father’s retirement in 1991. Brother Jean-Paul has stayed on at the family cellars, being joined by his wife, Corinne and their son, Loïc. Their 2013 Côte-Rôtie from this side of the Jamet family remains a blend for a wide variety of different *lieux à dits* and comes in at a nicely classic thirteen percent octane. In fact, and the wine is utterly classic on both the nose and palate, with the superb bouquet jumping from the glass in a complex blend of red and black raspberries, pepper, spiced meats, a lovely base of soil, black olives, woodsmoke and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very transparent down to the soil, with a fine core of fruit, firm, suave tannins, tangy acids and excellent balance and grip on the nascently complex and very promising finish. This is not an overly powerful style of Côte-Rôtie, but one that is rock solid, very soil-driven and balanced to age very long and gracefully. Fine, fine juice. 2023-2065+. **94.**

#### **2013 Côte-Rôtie “Ampodium”- Domaine René Rostaing**

The 2013 Ampodium bottling from René Rostaing, which readers will recall is his blended cuvée, is an absolutely classic bottle of young Côte-Rôtie. The bouquet is bright, precise and very transparent, offering up a marvelous blend of raspberries, pepper, spiced meats, stony soil tones, woodsmoke, a nice touch of stems and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and gorgeously soil-driven, but coupled to a very sappy core of red fruit, impeccable focus and balance, ripe, moderate tannins and great length and grip on the

nascently complex and utterly seamless balance. This is utterly superb and will not need too many years in the cellar to start to drink with generosity. 2020-2050+. **93.**

### **2013 Côte-Rôtie “Coeur de Combard”- Domaine Gilles Barge**

Domaine Barge has decided to label their cuvée from their newly reclaimed vineyard of Le Combard as “Coeur de Combard” in vintages that they deem “exceptional”, as is the case with the 2013. One sniff of this wine and one immediately comes to agreement with the Barge family that this wine is indeed outstanding! The 2013 Coeur de Combard is another low octane beauty from the domaine, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol. The bouquet is deep, pure and still fairly primary, offering up a traditional mix of red and black raspberries, stems, stony soil tones, pepper, gamebird and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and peppery, with a fine core of fruit, excellent balance, ripe tannins and a long, peppery and youthfully complex finish. This is not a blockbuster, but rather a wine of supreme elegance, soil fidelity and native complexity and it will be beautiful in the fullness of time. 2023-2070+. **94.**

### **2013 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gilles Barge**

The 2013 Côte Brune bottling from the Barge family is a glorious expression of this legendary vineyard, as the purity of the vintage allows every ounce of complexity of Côte Brune to shine through, even at this very early stage in the wine’s development! The bouquet is precise and classic, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, roasted game, woodsmoke, youthful stems, pepper, a touch of youthful syrah medicinal overtones and a very complex base of dark, stony soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with a firm chassis of ripe tannin, great balance and a very long, primary and palate-staining finish. This is going to be a great, great bottle of Côte-Rôtie in the fullness of time, and fans of Marius Gentaz would do well to tuck a box of this wine away in their cellars for future gratification! 2025-2075+. **95.**

### **2013 Côte-Rôtie “La Viallière”- Domaine Champet**

The 2013 Côte-Rôtie “La Viallière” from Domaine Champet is another outstanding example of this excellent vintage. The bouquet is deep, youthful and very much defined by its underlying soil tones, offering up scents of black raspberries, black cherries, roasted venison, pepper, black olive, woodsmoke and an outstanding base of soil tones. On the palate the wine delivers every ounce of promise of the nose, with its full-bodied format firm and chiseled. The core is pure black fruit, the soil signature is exemplary and the wine delivers excellent focus and grip on the long, ripely tannic and nascently complex finish. All of the elegance of the vintage can be found here, coupled to the classically sturdy style of Domaine Champet. Great juice in the making. 2023-2075+. **93.**

### **2013 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- Domaine René Rostaing**

The 2013 La Landonne from René Rostaing is a beautiful synthesis of the inherent elegance of the vintage and the stony and smoky fruit tones of the vineyard. The bouquet is deep, nascently complex and very promising, wafting from the glass in a blend of raspberries, smoked cherries, pepper, a touch of chocolate, marvelous soil tones, a touch of hazelnut, gamebird, youthful stems and just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, transparent and shows off great mid-palate depth, with excellent focus and balance, a sappy core and a very long, ripely tannic, palate-staining and still quite youthful finish. This is going to be a great La Landonne from Monsieur Rostaing, but it will need some extended cellaring to reach its apogee. 2025-2075. **95.**



### **2013 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- Domaine Gilles Barge**

2013 marks the inaugural vintage of a Côte Blonde bottling from Domaine Gilles Barge, as their production from this superb vineyard was always reserved for inclusion in their Cuvée du Plessy prior to 2013. There are only sixteen hundred bottles of this first vintage of Côte Blonde from the Barge family, as this is made from their oldest vines in this vineyard and presumably comes primarily from the half hectare parcel of *Petite Sérine* that the family began sourcing from Joseph Duplessy in 1978. The Barge family’s 2013 Côte Blonde is a stunning young Côte-Rôtie, wafting from the glass in a completely suave and smoky nose of red and black raspberries, gamebird, pepper, youthful stem tones, a beautiful base of soil, incipient nuttiness, woodsmoke, lovely spices and just a hint of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and utterly refined, with a fine core of fruit, excellent transparency, firm, ripe tannins, good acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and seamlessly balanced finish. This is not quite as big a wine as the 2013 Côte Brune from the domaine, but it is every bit as intensely flavored and promising! 2024-2075. 94+.

### **2013 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- Domaine René Rostaing**

The 2013 Côte Blonde from René Rostaing is another absolutely stellar bottle of young Côte-Rôtie. The very expressive bouquet is deep, smoky and nascently complex, soaring from the glass in a blend of black cherries, raspberries, gamebird, incipient notes of nutskin, a beautiful base of soil, delicate peppery tones, coffee, youthful stems, woodsmoke and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and utterly suave on the attack, with a

superb core of fruit, exceptional transparency, ripe, seamless tannins and excellent focus and grip on the very long, youthful and energetic finish. This could well be the second coming of the legendary 1991 Côte Blonde from René Rostaing! 2023-2075. **95+**.

***A Very Tasty, Albeit Slightly Modern, 2011 Côte-Rôtie***  
**2011 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Michel et Stéphane Ogier**

The Côte-Rôtie regular bottling from Stéphane Ogier is a blended wine that is about seventy percent *Côte de Brune* fruit and thirty percent *Côte de Blonde*, with no viognier in the blend. The wine includes about twenty percent whole clusters and is raised in thirty percent new oak casks. The 2011 offers up a very pretty, stylish bouquet of black cherries, black raspberries, grilled meats, chocolate, pepper, soil and a touch of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and suave on the attack, with a good core, a nice dollop of soil tones and a long, moderately tannic and well-balanced finish. This is a very well-made wine that is already fairly tasty, though still at least a few years away from really blossoming, but in this lineup with all these staunchly traditionalist bottlings, one can see the limitations of a more modern approach in Côte-Rôtie. That is not to say that this wine is not very tasty, and I would be happy to drink it any time, but if there is a Jamet or a Champet or a Barge option on the wine list, I would certainly not opt for the Ogier bottling! 2019-2045+. **90.**



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INCLUDING A GREAT LINEUP OF CUTTING EDGE WINES FROM OREGON**



*Forty year-old cabernet vines nearly ready for harvest at Corison's Kronos Vineyard on the Rutherford Bench.*

More and more interesting, classically-styled wines keep finding me from America's premier wine-producing states of California, Oregon and Washington. Most of them are from up and coming producers of the most recent generation, who have turned their backs on the high octane, over the top wines that were the critical darlings of the 1990s and first decade of the new millennium, but there are also plenty of examples from long-established wineries that simply resisted the fashion of those lost two decades and continued on making wines in the classical mold that had brought them their initial success in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. At the start of September of this year, I did manage to sneak out to the west coast for a handful of days of tasting, but more often than not, I am fortunate enough to be able to receive samples here in New York from so many exciting producers that I do not have to hop on a plane and traipse the three thousand-plus miles across the country to taste through the latest round of new releases from America's finest producers. For this report, I thought to try and fill in a big hole in the coverage of American wines in View From the Cellar that has been bothering me for years, for though I have been covering my bases in California pretty well for the last five or six years, I have not been tasting extensively amongst producers in either Oregon or Washington. Happily, for this

article, I was able to at least get a better look at some of the most exciting producers in the state of Oregon, as an old friend from my days in the New York wine trade has relocated out to the Pacific Northwest and was able to organize a pretty impressive array of samples to help get me started on coming up to speed on the cutting edge of wine in this state.

Many of the Oregon producers whose wines I tasted for the first time for this report are champions of the “natural wine movement” (certainly a rather amorphous term that really does not hold a lot of meaning these days, given the wide, wide variety of wines that are often lumped together under this rubric), and some of them were flat out stunning, while others were a bit more wildly experimental and not always a ringing success to my palate. But, what was most important was that so many of the wines I tasted from these growers was the vitality that was in evidence in their wines, whether I happened to love them (which was the vast majority of the bottles) or wondered aloud about what the intention of the winemaker was with a particular bottling. As so many of these wines also hailed from the very torrid 2014 vintage, with most wines still beautifully managing octane levels and showing loads and loads of soil tones, just demonstrates how much talent is on display here! There are not a whole lot of dynamic corners of the American cultural ferment these days, with seemingly every story of creative invention coupled to an instance of blight, neglect and economic decay here in the States (if one bothers to pay attention to each side of the present day American ledger), and our historical moment is probably quite realistically encapsulated in the rather desultory state of our presidential election options this year. So, to open bottle after bottle of vibrant and often exhilarating wine from small, young and highly motivated Oregon producers was a great palliative for our current moment in history, with many of these wines not only “different”, but stunningly refined and complex as well. That said, I do hope that some of these top producers do not become too enamored of the “unique” in the world of wine and continue to focus not only on singularity, but also on excellence in the bottle, as there is always a risk that the technique will become the *raison d’être*, rather than the most honest and successful way to deliver high quality wines.

While there were several outstanding estates from this coterie of Oregon producers, there are two that I would like to single out in particular for mention at the outset. One is the project called Ovum Wines, run by John and Ksenija House, who search out old vine parcels in great *terroirs* of several less popular varieties in the winemaking firmament of Oregon, such as Gewurztraminer, Muscat and Riesling. Across the board, every example that I tasted from Ovum was truly exceptional- this is particularly true of their stellar selection of 2015s- and I cannot recommend these wines highly enough. Their 2015 bottlings of Gewurztraminer may well be the single finest expressions of this grape that I have tasted from anywhere! Another winemaker that readers should make a special effort to search out is Chad Stock, who is now the full-time winemaker at Omero Cellars since 2014, as well as running his own project which he calls Minimus. Chad is making some absolutely beautiful wines under both labels, and it seems to me that he is soon going to be very, very well-known beyond his current circle of Oregon wine lovers. His Minimus label he reserves for what he likes to call “experiments”, with each wine quite singular in terms of vineyard source, varietal or blend, and winemaking approach. Some are totally off the wall, like a sauvignon blanc made under a *flor* in Sherry fashion, while others are utterly classical in style and included one of the best American examples of chardonnay I have ever tasted outside of the orbit of Kalin Cellars or Stony Hill Cellars, not to mention his several simply brilliant syrah-based cuvées. Most Minimus bottlings are numbered, as

Experiment One, Two or Seventeen, and some have all of the background information on the wine on the back label, whereas others require some deep digging on the internet to find out what Chad was aiming for with the cuvée. But there is a common thread with all of Chad's wines at either address, and this is pure excellence with a classically-inspired aesthetic.

Beyond this coterie of new producers to these pages from the state of Oregon (and I really cannot overstate how exciting and beautifully-made many of these wines were!) was a lovely range of wines from some of my favorite American wine classicists, and there are notes on some stunning new releases in the pages that follow. Amongst these stalwarts were the 2013s from Chris Camarda's superb Andrew Will Winery in Washington state. As readers will recall from my domaine profile on Andrew Will a couple of years ago, this is one of my "First Growth" Bordeaux varietal estates in all of the United States these days (if one finds current day pricing of Cheval Blanc a bit uncomfortable, one should assiduously seek out some of the fine wines being produced at Andrew Will), and the last five or six vintages here have been absolutely stellar. The 2013s are all very successful, but also very much a reflection of their vintage, as 2013 was a very hot summer that only saw the heat ease up in the second half of September, as a week of rain and the cooler temperatures allowed the grapes that had not yet been picked to mellow out on the vines for a few more weeks and accumulate more complexity and precision. The summer was the hottest on record in Washington wine country since 2005 and 2003, but the cooler weather at the backend of the vintage allowed later ripening grapes to come in with less of a "warm vintage" personality, so cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and syrah did very, very well in this vintage. Merlot was ready earlier, and as Chris Camarda tends to rely on a blend of all the major Bordeaux varietals for his top cuvées, a few of his wines show more of the torrid vintage characteristics, due to the higher percentage of merlot in those bottlings.

Another very exciting new release reviewed below is the new Oregon vineyard project of the Drouhin family, which they have named Roserock. The Drouhins have purchased a fifty hectare vineyard in the southern end of the Eola-Amity Hills section of the Willamette Valley, with the vines on slopes that range from five hundred and fifty to seven hundred and fifty feet above sea level, situated right in the path of the Van Duzer corridor that brings in cool air flow throughout the growing season. This *terroir* is quite a bit cooler than their original vineyards in the Dundee Hills that are the foundation of the Domaine Drouhin wines, and ever since Véronique Drouhin-Boss told me about the Roserock project a year or so ago, I have been looking forward to tasting their 2014s, which are the first from this new vineyard source. The new wines are simply outstanding. The vineyard is primarily planted to pinot noir right now (forty-five of the fifty hectares are pinot), and from what I understand, there is room for further vineyard expansion down the road if the need arises. As readers will recall, I have always liked the Domaine Drouhin Oregon wines that I have tasted in the past, but it seems very likely that the acquisition of the Roserock property is going to open a new and very exciting chapter of the Drouhin family's history in Oregon and it seems likely that they are about to make the very finest wines of their careers in this state from this excellent new vineyard!

I should also single out for mention in this introduction the superb range of wines I tasted from another new California producer to me, Brack Mountain Vineyards. Brack Mountain has a number of different labels under which they bottle wine, as they are sourcing grapes from several different AVAs and have designated different labels for different regions. Consequently, they

have the “Borne Wines” label for wines from the Anderson Valley in Mendocino, “Daniel” for their single vineyard cuvées from Sonoma Coast, Mendocino and the Russian River Valley, “l’Oliveto” for their other Russian River wines, and “Bench Wines” for their introductory level bottlings from Sonoma County. Head Winemaker at Brack Mountain, Dan Fitzgerald and his team, are committed to making old school, low octane wines from their myriad of vineyard sources and are doing marvelous work. All the wines are fermented with indigenous yeasts, from grapes picked early enough to keep octanes way down and are raised in modest percentages of new oak to allow their old world character to take center stage. There are truly some stunning wines currently available under the several different labels from Brack Mountain and this is a name to keep an eye out for in the market, as several of the wines are also excellent bargains!

Another excellent new (to me) California producer for classically-inclined wine enthusiasts to keep a watch for in the market is Terragena. Terragena is the label of winemaker Chris Buchanan, whose home base vineyard is located in Humboldt County and is planted to chardonnay and pinot noir. Beyond his wines produced from his Humboldt County vines, he is also producing a pinot noir bottling from the Anderson Valley and a cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc blend from Alexander Valley, and all of the wines that I tasted for this report from Terragena were outstanding and this is clearly a winery on the rise in California! As this report was already growing to a pretty serious number of pages by mid-September, I did not reach out for new releases from many of my favorite old school producers from the west coast of the United States for this report, figuring that it would be more logical to write another feature on these regions in a couple of issues and not make this report too large for comfortable navigation. So, if you do not find some of your favorite wineries listed in the pages that follow, just assume that they will be featured prominently in Issue 67, once I have had a chance to go taste and write up the 2015 vintage in Burgundy. Additionally, as I am planning producer profiles on Cathy Corison, Ric Forman and another round of great wines from Terry and Frances Leighton of Kalin Cellars for coming issues, none of the recent releases that I have tasted from these estates are listed in this article. The following notes are grouped by varietal (or similar blends), and then listed chronologically from youngest to oldest within each varietal category. All the wines from the same vintage are then sorted alphabetically. Please take your time with this report, as there are dozens and dozens of absolutely brilliant wines featured in the pages that follow!

### ***Sparkling Wines***

#### **Minimus “Forty-Eight Months” Sparkling Wine Number 17**

**Disgorged May 2016**

The Minimus “Forty-Eight Months” sparkling wine is a blend of pinot gris and chardonnay that he has aged for fully four years *sur latte*. He previously released a two year-old version of this wine as experiment number ten. The *vins clairs* for this bottling hail from the 2011 vintage and were fermented in stainless steel. The bouquet wafts from the glass in an exotic mix of baked peach, sweet almonds, buttery brioche, a nice dollop of soil and a touch of honey in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, crisp and full-bodied, with a good core of fruit, very elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and frothy finish. Chad Stock’s inspiration for this wine is the top level, long-aged Cava of Catalunya, and texturally, this wine is very similar on the palate to those fine sparkling wines. Lovely juice. 2016-2030. **91.**

#### **2015 Pétillant Naturel (Pinot Noir)- Art and Science (Willamette Valley)**

The 2015 Pétillant Naturel from Art and Science is a fairly dark salmon color and offers up a really pretty and vibrant bouquet of strawberries, blood orange, roses, gentle smokiness and



a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and frothy, with a fine core, good balance and a long, quite vinous finish. This is a sparkling pinot noir that really demands food to accompany it, but would be simply outstanding with the holiday turkey! 2016-2020. **88.**

**2014 Pétillant Naturel (Pinot Noir)- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)**

The 2014 Pétillant Naturel from Johan Vineyards is a really beautiful bottle of sparkling rosé, wafting from the glass in a bright and zesty nose of blood orange, rhubarb, plenty of smokiness, a nice dollop of soil and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, bright acids and good balance on the long, quite dry and tasty finish. A fine example. 2016-2018. **89.**

**2012 Blanc de Noirs “Atavus Vineyard” Brut- Analemma Wines (Columbia Gorge)**

The 2012 Blanc de Noirs from Analemma Wines is composed entirely of pinot noir and was aged *sur latte* for fully three and a half years prior to disgorgement and release into the market. This parcel of pinot noir in the Atavus Vineyard is well over forty years of age and the *vin clair* was aged in cask for six months prior to *assemblage* and bottling. The bouquet of the 2012 version offers up an excellent bouquet of white peach, apple, warm biscuits, a fine base of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and very well-balanced, with frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and grip, nice backend soil signature and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is still a youthful bottle and further bottle age will really allow it to blossom fully. Fine, very refined bubbly. 2018-2030+. **91+.**



### ***Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon***

#### **2015 Sauvignon Blanc “Union School Vineyard”- Bow & Arrow (Willamette Valley)**

The 2015 Sauvignon Blanc “Union School Vineyard” from Bow & Arrow’s winemaker, Scott Frank, comes in at a cool 12.7 percent octane and was eighty percent barrel-fermented, with only twenty percent of the wine having been raised in stainless. Thirty percent of the casks are new for this wine, which also spent forty-eight hours macerating on the skins to help raise it above the ordinary run of the mill sauvignon blanc. The wine offers up a pure and expressive bouquet of ripe pineapple, lemon curd, a nice touch of botanicals, a sound base of soil and just a whisper of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a lovely core, fine complexity and a very long, snappy and slightly oaky finish. This wine is long on personality, without the classic sauvignon blanc profile one expects, but lovely balance and plenty of intrigue. Good juice, albeit a fairly idiosyncratic version of this varietal. 2016-2018. **91+**.

#### **2015 Sauvignon Blanc- Heitz Wine Cellars (Napa)**

The new release of the Heitz family’s sauvignon blanc is a lovely wine. The bouquet is bright and vivacious, wafting from the glass in a blend of grapefruit, lime, fresh-cut grass, a touch of petrol and a nice base of sandy soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and succulent, with a good, solid core, zesty acids and fine balance and grip on the dancing finish. This offers up everything one could ask for in a middleweight and classy example of this under-respected varietal. A lovely food wine. 2016-2018. **89**.

#### **2015 White Wine “SM1”- Minimus (Applegate Valley)**

The 2015 “SM1” from Minimus hails from the cool, high elevation Stuart Maris Vineyard and is comprised entirely of sauvignon blanc, which is harvested late to cut back on some of the grassiness of the grape. Chad Stock gives this wine some extended skin contact and ages the wine in amphora. The 2015 version comes in at 13.3 percent alcohol and offers up a ripe and unique bouquet of poached apples, a touch of honey, candied orange, a nice dollop of soil and just a whisper of savory notes in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly complex, with a superb core, good framing acids and fine length and grip on the focused finish. This is light years removed from most examples of sauvignon blanc, and though it does not have a lot of what we consider “varietal character” for this grape, the wine is balanced and impressively complex in its unique interpretation of sauvignon blanc. I should note that the varietal name does not appear on the label anywhere! 2016-2020. **90**.

#### **2014 Sémillon “Coury Old Vine” David Hill Vineyard- Golden Cluster**

The 2014 Sémillon “Old Vine” from the David Hill Vineyard hails from a parcel planted in 1965 by Charles Coury, one of Oregon’s winemaking pioneers. There are not a lot of these old vines still remaining and the winery only produced fifty-six cases of this wine. The 2014 comes in at 12.5 percent octane and is still a very young wine, offering up a youthfully reticent bouquet of apple, paraffin, white peach, lovely soil tones, orange peel and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, crisp and full-bodied, with lovely focus and grip, a good core and fine length and grip on the still very primary finish. This is still a very young wine and really deserves some time in the cellar to blossom and start to drink with more complexity, but all of the constituent components are here and this wine will drink beautifully with a bit of bottle age. 2018-2025+. **91+**.

#### **2014 Sémillon “Coury Old Vine- Ode to Chuck” David Hill Vineyard- Golden Cluster**

The 2014 Sémillon “Ode to Chuck” bottling from Golden Cluster is a barrel selection of the best two casks (of the five total!) in the cellar of this wine, which is dedicated to Charles Coury, who planted this vineyard, but never had a chance to make a wine from these grapes. These two casks just worked beautifully together, which is how this “non-reserve” reserve wine was born. The bouquet is more expressive than the “regular” bottling at this point, jumping from the glass in a mix of fresh fig, incipient notes of petrol, lovely soil tones, beeswax, vanillin oak and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, wide open and classy finish. This wine closes with just a touch of backend bitterness that reminds me a bit of young chenin blanc, though all of the flavors are classic sémillon. 2016-2025+. **93.**

#### **2014 Sauvignon Blanc “Cariblanco”- Kingston Family Vineyards (Chile) screwcap**

The 2014 sauvignon blanc from Kingston Family Vineyards is a very pretty example of this varietal, offering up a bright and gently grassy nose of pink grapefruit, tart orange, fresh-cut grass, a touch of petrol and gentle floral notes in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and a bit short on the backend, with a touch of reduction clipping the finish and clamping down on what otherwise would be a very nice finish. This would still be cruising along nicely in natural cork, as the underlying wine is excellent, but is a tad compromised by its closure today. 2016-2017. **86.**

#### **2013 Sémillon “Coury Old Vine” David Hill Vineyard- Golden Cluster**

The 2013 vintage of Coury Old Vine Sémillon from Golden Cluster is starting to stir on both the nose and palate and is beginning to show some secondary layers of complexity. This was even a shorter crop than in 2014, so only forty-eight cases were produced and the wine comes in at a cool 11.9 percent alcohol. The blossoming nose offers up a complex mélange of lemon peel, petrol, a touch of peach, hot wax, honey and a nice touch of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and just a touch volatile, but with lovely intensity of flavor and complexity, fine focus and a long, vibrant finish. Despite the touch of volatile acidity (which oddly is only evident on the palate, not on the nose at all), this is lovely wine and really works well at the table. 2016-2023. **90.**

#### **2012 Sauvignon Blanc “Flower” #16 “Stella Maris Vineyard”- Minimus (Applegate Valley)**

This is one of Chad Stock’s most imaginative experiments, as this wine spent forty-one months aging in cask under a *flor* as one would find in Sherry cellars in the Jerez. The only way to keep the *flor* alive without fortifying the wine is to have a potential alcohol of at least fifteen percent, so the sauvignon blanc grapes for this were picked very ripe. By the time the fermentation finished, the wine was 14.6 percent, but with some evaporation over the course of the three and a half years the wine spent in old casks, it mounted to 15.9 percent alcohol. The color is still quite pale gold and the wine offers up a fine nose of lemon, lovely soil tones, gently nutty, Sherry-like tones from the *flor* and marinated orange peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, nascently complex and racy, with fine focus and grip, plenty of character from its *flor* and just a bit of heat on the vibrant and well-balanced finish. I would think that this would work beautifully as a Sherry substitute, as to my palate, it is a bit too high in octane to drink throughout the meal. It is a beautifully made wine and a very cool idea, but it is really quite unique and is certainly not going to be for everyone. 2016-2030. **93.**



## **Chardonnay**

### **2014 Chardonnay “Oak Ridge Vineyard”- Analemma (Columbia Gorge)**

The Oak Ridge Vineyard in the Columbia Gorge in Washington has chardonnay vines that were planted in 1984, with Analemma sharing farming duties on this organically certified parcel of land. The 2014 Chardonnay from Oak Ridge comes in at 13.6 percent alcohol and offers up TCA.

### **2014 Chardonnay “Mile Marker 33.89”- Borne Wines (Anderson Valley)**

Borne Wines is another label from Brack Mountain Winery, which is reserved for their bottlings from Mendocino’s Anderson Valley. The 2014 chardonnay is a cool customer, coming in at 13.3 percent octane and offering up a superb bouquet of apple, pear, esthery notes of bee pollen, a touch of almond paste, lovely soil tones, lemon blossoms and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very nicely balanced, with a good core, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex and zesty finish. This is really fine chardonnay that seems likely to age quite gracefully, and I might tuck it away in the cellar for a year or two and let its secondary layers emerge. Fine juice. 2017-2030. **92.**

### **2014 Chardonnay “Sangiaco Vella Ranch”- Daniel (Sonoma Coast)**

The 2014 Chardonnay “Sangiaco Vella Ranch” from Daniel is barrel-fermented entirely with indigenous yeasts, raised in one-third new wood and came in at a nicely measured 13.6 percent octane. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of pear, fresh pineapple, gentle leesy tones, a dollop of lemon oil, a nice base of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, sound framing acids and fine length and grip on the wide open finish. This does not have the race and cut it might have had at thirteen percent, but it is very nicely balanced and will make fine drinking for the next few years. 2016-2018+? **90.**

### **2014 Chardonnay “Cooper Mountain Vineyards”- Division Wine (Chehalem Mountain)**

The 2014 Chardonnay “Cooper Mountain Vineyards” from Division Wine Company is a beautiful, low octane chardonnay that comes in at 12.1 percent. The vines at Cooper Mountain were planted in 1978 and the 2014 version was raised in fifty percent new oak (as there were only two casks produced). The bouquet is a touch reductive in the modern, white Burgundy style, offering up scents of apple, pear, plenty of iodine, hazelnuts, a good base of soil and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and focused, with lovely balance and backend bounce, good acids and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. At its low octane, there is not tremendous depth at the core, but there is excellent backend energy and persistence of flavor. 2016-2025. **91+.**

### **2014 Chardonnay “Cuvée Arthur”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)**

The 2014 Chardonnay “Cuvée Arthur” from Domaine Drouhin is pretty ripe, coming in at 14.1 percent alcohol, but that is the nature of the vintage. The bouquet is deep and gently new oaky, offering up scents of apple, peach, *crème patissière*, a fine base of soil, fresh almond and buttery new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with sound acidity, fine focus and grip and a long, still quite primary finish. Structurally, this wine is already quite approachable, but none of its secondary layers of complexity have started to emerge and I would be inclined to still let it age for a year or two in the cellar. 2016-2025. **90+.**

### **2014 Chardonnay “Johan Vineyard”- Holden Wine Company (Willamette Valley)**

The 2014 Chardonnay “Johan Vineyard” from Sterling Whitted is a lovely, low octane and quite soil-driven example of the varietal, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offering up lovely purity on the palate and perfume on the nose. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend

of pear, buttered hazelnuts, a nice base of soil tones, lemon peel and a gentle topnote of honeysuckle. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and loaded with backend energy, with fine focus and grip, impeccable balance and a long, complex and very classy finish. I love the backend lift on this wine! Fine, fine juice. 2016-2025. **92.**

**2014 Chardonnay- Mayacamas Vineyards (Mount Veeder)**

The 2014 chardonnay from Mayacamas is their 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary bottling, as the estate was founded in 1889. The wine is very pretty, wafting from the glass in a bright blend of lemon, apple, spring flowers, a nice base of soil tones and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and fairly ripe in personality (coming in at 14.25 percent octane on the label), with fine acids, a good core, fine purity and focus and a long, youthful, very slightly heady finish. I do not find this fundamentally different than the chardonnays produced by Bob Travers during his long career here, but this is a riper vintage for the estate's chard and the wine will probably drink on the earlier side as a result. Quite tasty, albeit a touch ripe. 2016-2025. **89.**

**2014 Chardonnay- Mindego Ridge (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

The 2014 Chardonnay from Mindego Ridge is a good, solid bottle. The bouquet is pretty and fairly ripe in profile, offering up scents of apple, pineapple, a touch of lees, citrus peel and butter oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and not overly complex, with a good, solid core, sound framing acids and pretty good length and grip on the fruit-driven finish. This is 13.7 percent octane and not too bad as these things go, but a touch short on soil signature for a Santa Cruz Mountain bottling. 2016-2020+. **88.**

**2014 Chardonnay "Dijon Free"- Minimus (Willamette Valley)**

Minimus is the personal, experimental label of Chad Stock, who also moonlights as consulting winemaker for Omero Cellars in Carleton, Oregon. There is only a single barrel of this wine, which was made from chardonnay clones such as Wente and Musquée planted in the Johan Vineyard, rather than the ubiquitous Dijon clones that seem to be responsible for most American chardonnay. Chad raised it in new wood and the wine is flat out stunning, soaring from the glass in a deep and complex aromatic constellation of pears, iodine, spring flowers, a very discreet touch of leesiness, almond, soil and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil drive, bright acids and impeccable focus and grip on the long, complex and utterly seamless finish. This has the breed of Domaine Leflaive's Pucelles and flavors more reminiscent of Coche-Dury, without the oak char. Rather stunning Willamette Valley chardonnay, to say the least! 2016-2025. **94.**

**2014 Chardonnay "Russian River Valley"- l'Oliveto**

The 2014 Russian River Valley bottling of Chardonnay from l'Oliveto is another of the fine bottlings from Brack Mountain Wine Company. Like all of the Brack Mountain wines, head winemaker Dan Fitzgerald used only indigenous yeasts for this wine, with the *elevage* taking place in one third new oak. The wine delivers a fine bouquet of apple, pear, a lovely base of alluvial soil tones, spring flower, a touch of fresh almond and a judicious framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, bright, zesty acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, vibrant finish. The wine saw a bit of *battonage* during its *elevage*, which helped develop a lovely creamy mid-palate, but which has subsumed just a bit of the backend detail under the resulting gentle leesiness. 2016-2023. **89.**

#### **2014 Chardonnay “Willamette Valley”- Omero Cellars**

The 2014 Willamette Valley bottling of chardonnay from Omero Cellars is outstanding on both the nose and palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a superb blend of pear, white peach, gentle leesy tones, hazelnut, lovely soil nuances, a touch of vanillin oak and a bit of acacia blossom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely light on its feet on the backend, with a good core, impeccable balance and lovely length and grip on the vibrant finish. This wine comes in at an even thirteen percent alcohol and is really lovely juice out of the blocks, but this will age gracefully as well. 2016-2025. **92.**

#### **2014 Chardonnay “Monte Bello”- Ridge Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

I really like the 2014 vintage of Monte Bello chardonnay from Ridge, which is ripe, but also complex and beautifully balanced. The fine bouquet wafts from the glass in a nascently complex blend of pear, apple, a touch of bee pollen, a lovely base of salty soil tones, discreet vanillin oak and a gentle topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a very cool profile for its 14.3 percent alcohol, lovely focus and balance and a long, vibrant and classy finish. 2016-2025+. **92.**

#### **2014 Chardonnay- Roserock (Eola-Amity Hills)**

Roserock is the new vineyard project of the Drouhin family in Oregon, with 2014 being the first vintage released from the estate. The vineyard is planted on volcanic soils and is one of the cooler *terroirs* that the family works with in Oregon. The 2014 Roserock chardonnay offers up a pretty and quite floral bouquet of pear, gentle leesy tones, white lilies, fresh almond and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a lovely core of fruit, bright acids and excellent bounce and grip on the long and very well-balanced finish. This is still quite a young wine and will blossom nicely with a bit of bottle age. Though this is the first vintage, the wine looks likely to age very gracefully. 2016-2025. **91.**

#### **2013 Chardonnay “Mile Marker 33.89”- Borne (Anderson Valley)**

The 2013 example of Borne Chardonnay is really starting to come into its own, jumping from the glass in a very fine aromatic blend of pear, white peach, spring flowers, a stylish base of soil tones, discreetly savory notes redolent of wild fennel and lavender, vanillin oak and just a touch of the butteriness that will continue to develop with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with fine mid-palate depth, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the vibrant and classy finish. This is an excellent drink right now and will continue to age beautifully. Head Winemaker Dan Fitzgerald and his team are making exemplary chardonnays under their Borne label. 2016-2030. **92.**

#### **2013 Chardonnay “Visdom”- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)**

The Johan Vineyards “Visdom” bottling of chardonnay is produced from biodynamically farmed vineyards, is fermented with indigenous yeasts and comes in this year at a cool 12.5 percent octane. The wine is slightly hazy, but offers up a pure and complex bouquet of pear, a touch of apple pie, lovely, chalky soil tones, fresh almond, a touch of vanillin oak and a lovely topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, crisp and complex, with lovely intensity of flavor, a racy disposition and fine focus and grip on the long and stylish finish. This is a very stylish middleweight that is loaded with aromatic complexity, but the palate cannot quite keep pace with all of the fireworks on the nose. That said, this is still very good juice. 2016-2023. **89.**

### **2013 Chardonnay “Konkret”- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)**

The Johan Vineyards “Konkret” Chardonnay takes its name both from the stonier aspect of the soil in this lower portion of their estate vineyard, but also from the concrete tanks that it is fermented in before being racked off into smaller *feuillette* casks for its *elevage*. This bottling from Johan Vineyards is crystal clear, as it is not bottled with a touch of the lees, as is the case with the Visdom Chardonnay. The 2013 Konkret is a cool 11.8 percent octane and offers up a fine bouquet of buttered pears, fresh almond, lovely soil tones, a dollop of fresh nutmeg, musky floral tones and a very discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, juicy and energetic finish. This is a lovely wine that has impressive depth for its octane and is a delicious drink. 2016-2023. **90.**

### **2013 Chardonnay “Cuvée Dix-Neuvième”- Pearl Morisette (Niagara)**

This is North American wine, rather than American wine, as Pearl Morisette is located across the US border in Ontario, Canada. The man behind this outstanding wine is François Morisette, who attained his degree in oenology from the University of Dijon and worked at a few Burgundy domaines with which you may be familiar with: Domaine Mugnier, Domaine Gouges and Domaine Roulot! His 2013 is an outstanding bottle of chardonnay, having been fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in ten percent new casks, with the lion’s share of the other barrels used for the *elevage* older *foudres*. The wine is 13.5 percent octane and offers up a very pure and nicely esthery bouquet of pear, apple, a lovely base of soil tones, fresh almond and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, complex and vibrant, with lovely core, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty and complex finish. This is drinking very nicely at age three, but will clearly age another decade or more. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2026+. **92.**

### **2013 Chardonnay “Horseshoe Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

In the fifteen months since I last opened a bottle of the 2013 Horseshoe chardonnay, the wine has begun to gently shut down and is now in need of at least a couple of years in a quiet corner of the cellar. The bouquet is still deep, pure and nascently complex, offering up a mix of pear, apple, citrus peel, great minerality, a touch of iodine, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is more reserved in profile than was the case last summer, but deep, full-bodied and pure, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip and a long, primary and zesty finish. Just let it snooze for a bit! 2018-2040. **93.**

### **2013 Chardonnay “Monte Bello”- Ridge Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

The 2013 Monte Bello Chardonnay from Ridge is a pretty ripe customer, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol. The wine was raised in only six percent new wood, with a third of the casks being “one wine” barrels and the remainder three to six years of age. The bouquet is ripe and gently tropical in profile, offering up scents of pear, pineapple, orange blossoms and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced for its high octane, with a slightly concave core, but fine focus, sound acids and just a bit of backend heat on the long finish. This is good, but just a bit too ripe for my palate. 2016-2021. **87.**

### ***Pinot Gris***

### **2015 “Disagris” Pinot Gris (Antiquum Farm”- Minimus (Applegate Valley)**

The 2015 “Disagris” Pinot Gris is Chad Stock’s twist on pinot gris, which he fermented with the skins and left macerating in a cement egg with the skins for half a year. The wine is really a fairly dark rosé in color and offers up a *flora* nose of cherry skins, Sherry nuttiness, a nice touch of soil and some saline elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-

bodied, bright and surprisingly balanced and lively, with a good core, bright acids and good length and grip on the gently heady finish. I can understand the curiosity behind trying this, and it is very well done in its idiosyncratic style, but it is not a wine I would reach for with any frequency. By the way, this is experiment number twenty. Scoring this wine is difficult, as it is impeccably well-made, but crafted in a style that really does not appeal to me at all. So I will score it on its obvious merits, with the caveat that it may well not be for everyone! 2016-2025+. **92.**

#### **2015 Pinot Gris “Willamette Valley”- Omero Cellars**

The 2015 Omero Cellars Pinot Gris is quite an exotic wine, as fifteen percent of the fruit was separated and fermented with an extended skin contact for twenty days, while the remainder of the blend was fermented traditionally without maceration on the skins. The wines were raised separately in old casks and blended after ten months of aging. The color is deep from the skin contact portion, with the bouquet offering up an idiosyncratic nose of dried apricot, wheat chafe, smoky overtones and soil. There is an almost *flora* aspect to the nose from the extended skin maceration element. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with the *flora* elements of the nose carrying through in the flavors. The finish is long and energetic, but this has more intellectual than aesthetic appeal to my palate. It is certainly unique, but given the brilliance of the other wines in the Omero Cellars range that I tasted for this article, this is more of an experimentally-styled wine that I hope is a “one off”, though I imagine it has its admirers. 2016-2019+? **85.**

#### **2015 Pinot Gris “Crow Valley Vineyard”- Teutonic Wine Company (Willamette Valley)**

The 2015 Pinot Gris from the Teutonic Wine Company is a low octane example of this varietal, coming in at 11.9 percent alcohol. The Pinot Gris vines in the Crow Valley Vineyard are now thirty-six years of age, giving the wine plenty of mid-palate depth and soil signature. The 2015 wafts from the glass in a classy blend of apple, white peach, gentle leesy tones, spring flowers, fresh almond and a nice touch of bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip and a long, youthful and well balanced finish. This really has lovely weight and intensity for its octane level and will age very well indeed. I had no trouble drinking this bottle in its youth, but a year or two in the cellar will add even more luster to this fine wine. 2016-2030+. **89+.**

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

##### **2015 Gewurztraminer “Coury Old Vine” David Hill Vineyard- Golden Cluster**

The Gewurztraminer vines in the David Hill Vineyard were planted by Charles Coury back in 1965, making this the fiftieth harvest for these fine old vines. The Golden Cluster 2015 bottling is really lovely, offering up classic varietal exotica in a refined aromatic blend of apple, rosewater, lovely spices meat tones (redolent of a German deli), beautiful soil tones and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and elegant, with a fine core of fruit, good framing acids and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex, well-balanced and gently bitter finish. This is bone dry and should age very nicely. Today, the nose is a bit more expressive than the palate, but this may simply be a reflection of its relative youth. 2016-2025+. **89+.**

##### **2015 Gouges “Zivo Vineyard”- Minimus (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The technical details of the 2015 Gouges bottling from Minimus, which Chad Stock sourced from the Zivo Vineyard, informs us that “seventy-five percent of the fruit was pressed whole cluster and racked into a chestnut *puncheon*”, while the remainder of the fruit was left to

hang for an additional two weeks, destemmed after picking and dropped into the *puncheon* through the bung hole to ferment and macerate for one hundred days. This is experiment number eighteen by the way. The wine is quite good, despite its rather unique start on life, as it offers up a complex nose of pear, peach skin, buttered almonds, a lovely base of soil and a touch of its chestnut wood vessel. On the palate the wine is deep, round and complex, with just a touch of *flora* elements, a fine core, bright acids and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. As the name implies, this is made from a tiny patch of the pinot noir clonal variation that “went white” in Domaine Henri Gouges’ vineyards in Nuits St. Georges, and found its way to Oregon. This is a very good wine, but I would love to see it made conventionally by Chad and see just how high he could take it in terms of pure quality! 2016-2023. **91.**

**2015 Grüner Veltliner “Johan Vineyard”- Minimus (Willamette Valley)**

This cuvée Chad Stock’s 2015 Grüner Veltliner was sourced from the cool Johan Vineyard and included a high percentage of whole clusters (there is a second bottling of Grüner from a different vineyard as well). The wine is fermented and raised in puncheons made in Austria and bottled unfinned and unfiltered, after eight months of *elevage*. The 2015 Johan Vineyard Grüner Veltliner is beautifully expressive on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of yellow plum, peach, a touch of white pepper, lovely soil tones, gentle savory elements and a topnote of candied citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully expressive, with a fine core, impeccable focus and balance, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the finish. This is 13.2 percent and does not suffer from the octane issues that so many grand cru versions of this grape demonstrate from Austria these days. A beautiful wine. 2016-2023+. **93+.**

**2015 Vermentino “Layne Vineyard”- Minimus (Applegate Valley)**

The Layne Vineyard was planted in 1974 to cabernet sauvignon, with a portion of the vineyard grafted over to Vermentino in 2009, on a section of red volcanic soils. The 2015 Mini9mus Vermentino comes in at 13.2 percent octane and offers up a vibrant nose of tart pear, a touch of green olive, lovely minerality, lemon peel and white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully transparent, with a fine core, bright acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, classy finish that closes with a nice out of backend bitterness that works marvelously at the table. Fine juice. 2016-2025. **92.**

**2015 White Wine “SM2”- Minimus (Applegate Valley)**

The 2015 White Wine “SM2” from Chad Stock’s Minimus Wines is a blend of viognier and sauvignon blanc, which are co-fermented and then aged for ten months in acacia barrels. The “SM” on the label refers to the Stuart Maris Vineyard, from which both varieties were sourced. I should mention that none of this information is to be found on the label, but is easily located on the internet. With half the blend viognier, it is not too surprising that this is one of Chad’s riper 2015s, coming in at 13.8 percent, but shows only a touch of heat on the backend. The bouquet is ripe, exotic and very outgoing in personality, jumping from the glass in a blend of casaba melon, pear, tangerine, musky floral tones and acacia wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bold and deep, with good focus and grip, moderate complexity and good length on the slightly heady finish. Viognier lovers will enjoy this wine, but for me, like so many examples that include this varietal, the promise of the nose is not quite matched on the palate. Fans of viognier-based wines add at least three points. 2016-2019. **89.**

**2015 Gewürztraminer “Oak Ridge Vineyard”- Ovum Wines (Columbia Gorge)**

The 2015 Gewürztraminer “Oak Ridge Vineyard” bottling from Ovum Wines is outstanding on both the nose and palate, with its low octane personality (12.5 percent) belied by

the sheer exuberance the wine displays on both the nose and palate. The classic bouquet soars from the glass in a blend of apple, lychee nut, lovely spiced meat tones, a fine base of soil and a topnote of Gewurztraminer spices. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and very intensely flavored, with a lovely core, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is a beautiful example of Gewurztraminer that is amazingly transparent and light on its feet, despite just bursting with personality. 2016-2030. **92.**

**2015 Gewürztraminer “Love Me or Leave Me”- Ovum Wines (Rogue Valley)**

This 2015 Gewürztraminer from Ovum Wines hails from the Gerber Vineyard and these vines were planted in 1976. The wine comes in at 12.8 percent octane and was finished with seven grams per liter of residual sugar. The bouquet wafts from the glass in lovely and utterly classic blend of lychee nut, rosewater, a touch of spices meats, a nice dollop of soil and a touch of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with an excellent core of fruit, bright acids, lovely focus and grip and a very long, still quite primary finish. The seven grams of residual sugar simply buffer the acidity here seamlessly and the overall impression is of a bone dry wine. This reminds me a lot of a top young vintage of Trimbach Seigneurs de Ribeaupierre, which is about as high praise as I can offer for young gewürztraminer! Excellent juice. 2016-2030+. **93.**

**2015 Riesling “Off the Grid”- Ovum Wines (Rogue Valley)**

The isolated Off the Grid Vineyard lies close to the Oregon-California border in the remote southern reaches of Oregon, just twenty-five miles inland from the Pacific. The vineyard sits at an elevation of fifteen hundred feet and is planted on a dried riverbed, so that the vines struggle in the rock strewn soils and very cool microclimate. The 2015 Off the Grid Riesling from Ovum comes in at 12.5 percent octane and offers up a classic bouquet of apple, white cherry, citrus peel, stony minerality, petrol and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and tightly-knit, with fine balance and grip and a long, quite dry and nascently complex finish. This is tasty today, but really could do with at least a few years’ worth of bottle age to start to really blossom. 2018-2030+. **92.**

**2015 Riesling “Deep Water”- Ovum Wines (Dundee Hills)**

The 2014 Deep Water Riesling from Ovum from the Meyer Vineyard in the Dundee Hills and comes in at a cool 10.5 percent alcohol and is done is a drier Spätlese style. The bouquet is very pretty, offering up scents of pear, kiwi, lovely soil tones, a touch of bee pollen and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and very transparent, with a solid core, lovely focus and grip and a long, youthfully tight and minerally finish. This is tasty today, but still fairly primary in personality, and really deserves some bottle age to blossom properly. 2018-2030+. **91.**

**2015 Riesling “Toro y Scorpio”- Ovum Wines (Ribbon Ridge)**

The 2015 Riesling “Toro y Scorpio”- Ovum Wines is fairly dry in style, coming in at 12.2 percent alcohol and having a Spätlese-like residual sugar level of twenty-two grams per liter that gives the wine just a touch of sweetness on the palate. The bouquet is very pretty, offering up scents of apple, peach, gentle woodsy tones, spring flowers, a nice dollop of soil and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a nice tug between residual sweetness and acidity, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is weightier than a German Spätlese, with about the same level of sweetness and would be an ideal choice for Asian cuisine. Very tasty. 2016-2025. **90+.**





**2015 Riesling “Whale Memorista”- Ovum Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The 2015 Riesling “Whale Memorista” from Ovum Wines is absolutely superb on both the nose and palate, soaring from the glass in a classic aromatic blend of tangerine, pink grapefruit, gentle notes of petrol, beautiful minerality (the soils are basalt in this vineyard) and citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, lovely transparency and a very long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. This is 12.5 percent alcohol and essentially dry in style, with just a touch of residual sweetness on the attack. It is an absolutely beautiful wine! 2016-2030+. **93.**

**2015 “White Wine”- Teutonic Wine Company (Willamette Valley)**

The 2015 “White Wine” from the Teutonic Wine Company is comprised of a very unique blend of sixty percent Pinot Noir (without skin contact), thirty-five percent Muller Thurgau and five percent Chasselas and comes in at a very cool 11.45 percent alcohol. The bouquet is as singular as the *cépages* suggests, but also bright and intriguing in its mix of bread fruit, plenty of smokiness, lemongrass, dried flowers and a nice touch of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, poised and shows just a bit of residual sugar, with a good core, fine focus and good length and grip on the finish. The acidity here is not particularly high and the wine wanders a bit on the backend, but one has to admit it has plenty of personality and is very easy to drink! Not bad at all. 2016-2020. **88.**

**2015 Alsea Blanc- Teutonic Wine Company (Willamette Valley)**

The 2015 Alsea Blanc from the Teutonic Wine Company is a fifty-fifty blend of pinot blanc and pinot meunier from the winery's cool estate vineyard, which is planted not far from the Pacific coast. The 2015 comes in at a cool 11.11 percent alcohol and offers up lovely nose of apple, tart orange, spring flowers and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and well-balanced, with good acids, fine length and grip, but not a lot of backend precision on the finish. This is okay, but is a bit pedestrian on the backend. 2016-2023. **85.**

**2015 Jazz Odyssey "Wasson Vineyard"- Teutonic Wine Company (Willamette Valley)**

The 2015 Jazz Odyssey from the Teutonic Wine Company is a field blend of riesling, gewurztraminer and chardonnay from the Wasson Vineyard, which is finished with a touch of residual sugar to give it a lighter Auslese feel, albeit with only a portion of the blend comprised of riesling. The wine offers up a muskily floral bouquet of acacia blossoms, lilies, melon, a touch of gewurz spice tones, a hint of almond paste and bee pollen. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and fairly sweet, with nice balancing acids and a good core, but not the cleanest of finishes, despite its good length and grip. This lacks the delicacy I look for in wines of this style. It is okay, but probably the weakest cuvée that I tasted from this fine winery in preparation for this article. 2016-2020+. **84.**

**2015 Riesling "David Hill Vineyard"- Teutonic Wine Company (Willamette Valley)**

The 2015 Riesling from the Teutonic Wine Company is a very pretty wine, coming in at 12.6 percent alcohol and finished off in a Spätlese style. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, white cherry, bee pollen, nice soil tones and citrus blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with nice transparency down to its soil, just a touch of sweetness, bright acids and lovely bounce on the long and complex finish. This does not have the same overt minerality one finds in a German Spätlese from the Mosel or the Nahe, as it is grown on different soils, but the spirit here is very much the same and I really like this wine! 2016-2030. **91.**

**2015 Gewurztraminer "Crow Valley Vineyard"- Teutonic Wine Company (Will. Valley)**

The 2015 Gewurztraminer "Crow Valley Vineyard" bottling from the Teutonic Wine Company is again nicely low in octane, coming in at 12.5 percent and the wine is nicely light on its feet as a result. The bouquet offers up a very varietally-correct blend of rosewater, grapefruit, a nice base of minerality, a touch of lychee and gentle leesy tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and stylish, with just a touch of residual sweetness, good acids and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. My only complaint with this wine is that it is not particularly focused or precise, and suffers by comparison to the 2015 Riesling from this winery in this regard. This is still tasty, but the Riesling is a step up in 2015. 2016-2025. **88.**

**2014 Gewurztraminer "Atavus Vineyard"- Analemma (Columbia Gorge)**

The 2014 Gewurztraminer "Atavus Vineyard" from Analemma is a beautiful and utterly classic rendition of this varietal, recalling examples of the finest of Alsace in its lovely bouquet of lychee nut, apple, rosewater, lovely spice tones and a nice touch of loamy soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a fine core, bright acids and lovely complexity and grip on the long and nicely understated finish. Atavus Vineyard sits at an elevation of between 1600 and 1800 feet above sea level, and this cool climate vineyard has allowed the Gewurztraminer to really retain a feline shape, even in the riper vintage of 2014,

where the wine reached 13.6 percent octane, which is a touch higher than customary for this bottling. A very impressive wine. 2016-2023. **90+**.

**2014 Chenin Blanc “L’Isle Verte”- Division Villages (Washington)**

The Division Winemaking Company has a line of wines that they have dubbed “Division Villages” to denote fine, everyday drinkers at fair prices- in this case \$19.00 per bottle! Their 2014 chenin blanc is done in a Sec style, coming in at 13.1 percent octane and offering up a fine nose of white peach, gently musky floral tones, a touch of beeswax, a nice dollop of soil and just a hint of fresh pineapple in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, vibrant and extroverted finish. The finish shows lots of pineapple tones and closes with that classic chenin touch of citrus peel bitterness. This wine is nicely restrained on the nose, but loaded with personality on the palate and is a terrific value! 2016-2025. **91.**

**2014 Grüner Veltliner- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)**

The 2014 Grüner Veltliner from Johan Vineyards is barrel-fermented and comes in at a very civilized 11.8 percent alcohol in this vintage. The wine offers up a really lovely nose of apple, pink grapefruit, a nice touch of the varietal’s herbal complications (mostly fresh rosemary), really lovely soil tones, citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with excellent acids, an impressive core of fruit and lovely transparency on the long, poised and perfectly balanced finish. This is an utterly complete and compelling wine at a very low and enjoyable alcohol level. It is one of the most impressive examples of Grüner Veltliner I have tasted in several years, with the palate impact of a wine a couple of points higher in octane. This is eye-opening juice! 2016-2020+. **93.**

**2014 Gewürztraminer “In the Dark”- Ovum Wines (Rogue Valley)**

The 2014 Gewürztraminer from Ovum Wines also hails from the Gerber Vineyard’s 1976 old vines. This is nicely low in octane, coming in at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol. The nose is every bit as deep and classic as the lovely 2015 version, with perhaps just a touch more precision from its slightly lower ripeness level, as it wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, lychee nut, musky floral tones, a nice base of soil and rosewater. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and racy, with great intensity of flavor, laser-like focus, nascent complexity and outstanding length and grip on the vibrant and very classy finish. I love the combination of weightlessness and depth found in this wine, which is built for the long haul, but which is already drinking with plenty of style. 2016-2035+. **93.**

**2014 Riesling “Off the Grid”- Ovum Wines (Rogue Valley)**

The 2014 “Off the Grid” Riesling from Ovum Wines comes in at a very grown up 12.5 percent octane. This is one of three single vineyard bottlings of Riesling that the winery produced in 2014, and the wine is excellent, wafting from the glass in a fine aromatic blend of tart orange, petrol, gentle leesy tones, a touch of straw, citrus peel and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a fine core, bright acids and impressive backend energy and lift on the long and still quite youthful finish. This is still a young wine and the rather reserved nose does not prepare one for the vibrant and attention-grabbing palate! Fine juice that I would age for another few years to allow the nose to catch up with the superb palate. 2019-2040. **92+**.

**2014 Riesling “Memorista”- Ovum Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The 2014 Riesling “Memorista” from Ovum Wines is only 10.4 percent in alcohol and though I could not find information on its residual sugar level, I would suspect this is somewhere between forty and fifty grams per liter. The wine is young and very pretty, albeit still fairly

primary in profile and in need of a bit more bottle age. The bouquet offers up a lovely blend of apple, nectarine, honeycomb, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of musky floral nuances. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and nicely balanced, with a young Auslese personality, bright acids and fine length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is tasty to drink today, but I suspect more complexity will emerge with further bottle age. 2016-2030+. **90.**

**2013 Riesling “The Oyster” Corral Creek Vineyard- Ovum Wines (Chehalem Mountains)**

Ovum Wines’ 2013 “The Oyster” bottling of Riesling from Corral Creek Vineyard is quite low in alcohol, coming in at 10.4 percent, but the wine only has a faint touch of residual sugar and is essentially bone dry in style. The bouquet is starting to show some lovely secondary elements in its mélange of tangerine, apple, lovely soil tones, dried flowers, a hint of petrol and a discreet topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and focused, with a good core, lovely balance and a long, poised and zesty finish. This is a lovely middleweight that is drinking very nicely today, but will have no problem cruising along for many years. 2016-2030+. **91.**

**2013 Riesling “Off the Grid”- Ovum Wines (Rogue Valley)**

The 2013 Riesling “Off the Grid” from Ovum Wines comes in at an even twelve percent alcohol and offers up a lovely bouquet of apple, pineapple, just a whisper of petrol, lovely soil tones, spring flowers and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite dry, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip and a long, very well-balanced and complex finish. This is a beautiful bottle of dry Riesling that is now into its plateau of peak drinkability, but will have no troubles cruising along for another decade. Impressive. 2016-2026+. **92.**

***Rosé***

**2015 Rosé “Atavus Vineyard”- Analemma (Columbia Gorge)**

The 2015 “Atavus Vineyard” Rosé from Analemma is comprised entirely of pinot noir and is a very delicate, pale salmon color. The wine wafts from the glass in a fine nose of melon, dried roses, a touch of tangerine, gentle spice tones and a very nice dollop of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and savory, with a lovely core, bright acids, fine focus and grip and a fairly complex, very long and classy finish. This is a serious bottle of Rosé that cries out for food (particularly salmon), rather than being served as an aperitif. 2016-2019. **91.**

***Zinfandel***

**2012 Zinfandel “Ink Grade Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars (Napa)**

This is a lovely, old school example of zinfandel that does not show any signs of overripeness or jamminess on either the nose or palate. The wine is 14.5 percent octane and jumps from the glass in a fine aromatic mix of raspberries, red currants, lovely spice tones, a bit of peppercorn and a nice dollop of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, suave and quite velvety on the attack, with a wide open personality, just a touch of backend tannin and lovely focus and grip on the poised and well-balanced finish. This is delicious and reminds me quite a bit of the zins I drank back in my college days in the early 1980s. 2016-2030. **91.**



*Grignolino grapes ready for picking alongside of the Heitz Wine Cellars' tasting room.*

### ***Gamay, Cabernet Franc, Unexpected Varietals and Exotic Red Blends***

#### **2015 Gamay- Bow & Arrow Wines (Willamette Valley)**

At the present time, Gamay is the focus of Dana and Scott Frank's Bow & Arrow winery, and in a few scant vintages, he has quickly made a name for the label for the high quality and very fair prices of his wine. 2012 was the first commercial vintage for Bow & Arrow and already they are now the second largest producer of Gamay in the US, after Edmunds St. John. Their 2015 bottling comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and offers up a fine bouquet of sweet cranberries, dark plums, a bit of pepper, hints of gamebird, good soil nuance, fresh herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely crunchy in the tradition of Beaujolais, with a sappy core of black fruit, a fine base of soil, just a bit of backend tannin and a long, tangy and succulent finish. This is already delicious, but it has the stuffing and balance to also age nicely and I would be delighted to start pulling bottles of this from my cellar four or five years down the road. Fine juice. 2016-2025+. **92.**

#### **2015 Rhinestones (Gamay and Pinot Noir)- Bow & Arrow Wines (Willamette Valley)**

The 2015 version of Rhinestones is a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent gamay. The wine is a tad tight when first opened, but with a bit of swirling offers up a lovely bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of pepper, spit-roasted meats, fresh herbs and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, moderately tannic finish. This is 12.5 percent octane and absolutely laser-like on



the palate, with superb backer energy. I am sure this is intended as an early quaffer for restaurants in Portland, but this has the balance and structure to also age very well indeed! 2016-2030. **92.**

**2015 Interplanetary Traveler Red Wine- Holden Wine Company (Willamette Valley)**

The 2015 whimsically-packaged Interplanetary Traveler Red Wine from Holden Wine Company is a very pretty, carbonically macerated blend of sixty percent Gamay, thirty percent Dolcetto and ten percent Lagrein. The wine comes in under thirteen percent octane and simply soars from the glass in a sappy blend of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of Dolcetto tariness (or is it Lagrein tariness?), lovely floral tones, pepper and a very complex medley of spices that shows notes of cardamom, turmeric and cloves. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and plenty solid at the core, with a bit of backend tannin, fine grip and a long, complex and still fairly( youthful finish. This has a bit of backend tannin that it could still resolve, but it is also plenty tasty right out of the blocks. My only complaint with this wine is that it is bottled in clear glass, which of course makes for a fun package when coupled with the label of the astronaut), but given the seriousness of the wine under the cork, I would love to see it in green glass to protect it for those of us crazy enough to want to drink the wine a few years down the road, when it really blossoms! Fine juice. 2016-2025+. **92.**

**2015 Blaufrankisch “Johan Vineyard”- Minimus (Willamette Valley)**

I have tasted a few examples of the Blaufrankisch grape from Germany, but this example from Chad Stock’s Minimus label is the first I have ever tasted from the United States. The 2015 comes in at a cool 12.8 percent octane and offers up a vibrant bouquet of black cherries, pepper, lovely soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of tree bark. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and intensely flavored, with plenty of pepperiness on the palate, a solid core, tangy acids and a long, focused and moderately tannic finish. This is approachable today, but it really deserves at least a few years in the cellar to soften up a bit more on the backend. It has great finishing energy and precision and will be a terrific bottle of wine when it blossoms. 2019-2040+. **92.**

**2015 “Rock Well” American Red Wine- Minimus (Willamette Valley)**

This is a rare blended red wine from Chad Stock, “dedicated to the kid in all of us” as he likes to say. The *cépages* is forty percent Tempranillo, twenty-five percent Syrah, twenty percent Blaufrankisch and ten percent Viognier and five percent Sauvignon Blanc. As Chad writes, “there is fun to be had in making elaborately blended, impossible combinations of grapes that come together to make something representative of nothing we revere in wine,” and the 2015 Rock Well Red is his first commercial release in this vein. The wine comes in at 12.8 percent octane and offers up a really lovely nose of red and black cherries, tempranillo spices, bonfire, a bit of meatiness, hints of citrus peel and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, bright acids, just a whisper of tannin and impressive length and grip on the tasty finish. Do not ask me how this combination of grapes works, but it most assuredly does and the wine is delicious! 2016-2025? **91.**

**2015 Gamay Noir “Willamette Valley”- Omero Cellars**

The 2015 vintage of Gamay Noir from Omero Cellars included seventy percent whole clusters and the wine was aged in old casks for ten months prior to bottling without filtration. The bouquet is very true to its varietal and would not be out of place in a tasting of Cru Beaujolais, as it offers up scents of cherries, sweet cranberries, vinesmoke, a touch of weediness and a lovely base of autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and juicy, with excellent mid-palate depth, just a bit of backend tannins, tangy acids and fine length and

grip on the complex finish. There is just a touch of backend volatility here that needs to blow off with a few minutes in decanter, but once this has occurred, the wine is really a lovely mouthful of Gamay. 2016-2025. **90.**

**2015 Pinot Meunier “Borgo Pass Vineyard”- Teutonic Wine Company (Willamette Vly.)**

The 2015 Pinot Meunier from the Borgo Pass Vineyard hails from thirty year-old vines that are planted in this cool parcel. Owner Barnaby Tuttle ferments the wine with indigenous yeasts in old casks, with the 2015 coming in at 13.33 percent octane. The wine is nicely light in color and light on its feet. The bouquet offers up scents of cherries, cranberries, gentle smokiness, a fine base of soil and a topnote of dried herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and soil-driven, with a good core, bright acids and a bit of backend tannin adding chewiness and grip on the long and intensely flavored finish. This is a low fat wine that is high on personality, with the fruit playing a supporting role to the soil and smoky herb flavors here. This is really good with food, albeit a bit idiosyncratic in style and I really like its verve and outstanding length on the backend. 2016-2030+. **90+.**

**2014 Cabernet Franc “Granit” Mae’s Vineyard- Division Wine Co. (Applegate Valley)**

The cabernet franc vines in Mae’s Vineyard were planted in 2006, so this is still the tip of the iceberg for where this wine is going as the vines get older. However, the 2014 bottling from Division is not about to wait around for the future, as the wine offers up impressive depth and nascent complexity on both the nose and palate. The wine comes in at 13.4 percent alcohol, was raised exclusively in older wood and offers up an absolutely classic cabernet franc bouquet of sweet dark berries, cigar ash, a bit of tree bark, stony soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively transparent in personality, with a strong vein of soil, a good core of fruit, ripe, fairly firm tannins and outstanding length and grip on the well-balanced finish. As the name implies, Mae’s Vineyard is composed of a clay and loam topsoil over a profound base of granite. Clearly the folks at Division have been drinking their fair share of Bernard Baudry Chinon over the years, as this wine is utterly classic. There were only one hundred cases produced, so if you are lucky enough to track some down, tuck it away in the cellar for four or five years and really let it blossom! Fine, fine juice. 2020-2045. **92+.**

**2014 Gamay Noir Cru “Methven Family Vineyards”- Division (Eola- Amity Hills)**

The 2014 Gamay Noir “Methven Family Vineyards” from the Division Winemaking Company is pretty ripe for this grape, coming in at 13.7 percent octane, but the wine is fresh and vibrant on both the nose and palate. There were only eighty cases produced of this wine, which was raised in one old Burgundy cask and one old puncheon. The bouquet is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a Morgon-like blend of cherries, pomegranate, a lovely base of soil, woodsmoke, a bit of roasted *pigeon*, incipient notes of forest floor and an exotic topnote of dried eucalyptus (which I admit is not particularly typical of Morgon). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with an excellent core of fruit, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and soil-driven finish. This is the best Gamay bottling I have ever tasted from the United States! 2016-2030. **93.**

**2014 Red Wine “1787” Wasson Vineyard- Teutonic Wine Company (Willamette Valley)**

The 2014 bottling of “1787” from the Teutonic Wine Company is a blend of pinot noir and gamay that is raised in old oak casks. The wine is light in color and comes in at thirteen percent alcohol, offering up a bright and impressively complex blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, a touch of raw cocoa, lovely soil tones, a hint of fresh thyme and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and nicely sappy at the core, with good



focus and grip, just a touch of backend tannin and a long and juicy finish. This is not the most complex wine on the palate, but it delivers what it does have with style and is really a lovely middleweight. 2016-2030. **89**.

### **2013 Minimus “Phantom Limb” Belmont Vineyard Rouge #19 (Rogue Valley)**

The 2013 Phantom Limb from Chad Stock’s Minimus label is comprised entirely of Petit Sirah, but with eighty percent of the bunches partially cut and left hanging on the vines to dehydrate, while twenty percent were left alone and were still alive and succulent when collected. So think of this wine as Amarone made out of Petit Sirah, without the necessity of straw mats. The desiccated fruit brings the alcohol up here to 14.7 percent, but the bouquet offers up lovely purity and depth in its constellation of sweet blackberries, black cherries, hung game, a touch of pepper, violets, dark chocolate, a nice base of soil and a spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced for its upper level octane, with a sappy core, impressive soil signature, moderate tannins and a bit of backend heat on the long and vibrant finish. There is impressive depth and complexity here, but it is a bit hot on the backend for my sensitive palate. For those more intrepid, this is highly recommended, but for me the alcohol is the only element here that gets in the way of a truly great wine. 2016-2035+. **88** (add five points if you do not mind high octane).

### ***Italian Varietals***

#### **2014 Grignolino- Heitz Wine Cellars (Napa)**

The 2014 Grignolino from Heitz Wine Cellars is really a lovely middleweight this year, with all of the exotica of the grape on display in the beautiful bouquet, combined with lovely intensity of flavor and a light step on the palate. The color is almost that of a dark Rosé, but the bouquet is exuberant in its exotic mix of rosewater, cherry skin, blood orange and sandy soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and bouncy, with moderate depth (but fine intensity), bright acids and lovely length and grip on the vibrant and tasty finish. This is a completely unique wine in the pantheon of California, with aromatics that share a lot in common with gewurztraminer, light color and plenty of personality on the long and zesty palate. Lovely juice. 2016-2021. **89**.

#### **2014 Dolcetto- Holden Wine Company (Willamette Valley)**

The 2014 Dolcetto from young Sterling Whitted’s Holden Wine Company is a lovely example of the varietal, jumping from the glass in a vibrant blend of black cherries, bonfire, a touch of road tar, black licorice and a nice touch of minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with tangy acids, a touch of tannin, lovely focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This wine starts out a bit tight when first opened, but with a few minutes in decanter, it roars from the glass and is one of the best examples of Dolcetto I have ever tasted outside of Piemonte, and perhaps, even within! Great juice. 2016-2020+. **91+**.



### ***Pinot Noir***

#### **2014 Pinot Noir “Armstrong Vineyard”- Art and Science Winery (Ribbon Ridge)**

Dan Rinke at Art and Science has fashioned a really fine bottle of pinot from the Armstrong Vineyard in 2014. The wine comes in at a cool 13.3 percent octane and jumps from the glass in a vibrant bouquet of plums, black cherries, cola, a lovely mélange of sweet and savory spice tones, soil and a judicious framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and focused, with a fine core of fruit, impressive nascent complexity, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and still fairly primary finish. This needs a couple of years to really blossom, but it will be an excellent bottle once it has had a chance to stretch out a bit with bottle age. 2019-2040. **91+**.

#### **2014 Pinot Noir “Willamette Valley”- Franny Beck Wines**

The 2014 “Willamette Valley” bottling of pinot noir from Franny Beck was raised in fifteen percent new oak and comes in at a svelte 13.4 percent octane. The bouquet is complex, transparent and vibrant, offering up a classy blend of cherries, red plums, very pretty spice tones, a bit of gamebird, lovely soil nuances, an incipient note of chicory and just a touch of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and very soil-driven, with a fine intensity, bight acids, little tannin and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is a fine middleweight that delivers plenty of pleasure out of the blocks, but will also age very nicely over the mid-term. 2016-2030+. **91**.

**2014 Pinot Noir “Johan Vineyard”- Franny Beck Wines (Willamette Valley)**

The 2014 Johan Vineyard bottling of pinot from Franny Beck is a bit lighter in color than their Willamette Valley version, but equally pure and classy. The bouquet is vibrant and impressively transparent, offering up a lovely blend of cherries, strawberries, allspice, nutmeg, complex soil tones, woodsmoke, a dollop of fresh herbs and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and very soil-driven, with fine focus and grip, outstanding intensity of flavor without undue weight, impressive nascent complexity and a very long, moderately tannic and tangy finish. The backend shows a nice touch of whole clusters that augurs very well for its long-term evolution. This is a very cool vineyard and the wine exudes all of the inherent complexity found in pinot grapes that take their time reaching full ripeness. High class juice. 2018-2040+. **92+**.

**2014 Pinot Noir “Lester Family Vineyard”- Big Basin Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

This was the first wine I had tasted from Big Basin Vineyards, with the Lester Family Vineyard being one of a range of single vineyard bottlings that the winery offers. This vineyard is a cool site, not far from Monterey Bay. The winery used one hundred percent whole clusters for this wine, which was bottled without fining or filtration. The 2014 version is quite pretty, offering up a red fruity notes of cherries, beetroot, a touch of cocoa and a stylish base of new oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, suave and nicely balanced, with modest tannins, fine focus and grip and good length on the sappy finish. This is not overly complex, but it is tasty and nicely gauged at thirteen percent octane. 2016-2030+. **89**.

**2014 Pinot Noir “Hughes Hollow Vineyard”- Bow & Arrow (Eola- Amity Hills)**

This is a new offering from Bow & Arrow is their first effort with pinot noir. The wine was a touch reductive when I first opened it and needed some time in decanter to freshen up, but once it does so, it offers up a fine bouquet of cherries, quince, woodsmoke, lovely spice tones, a fine base of soil and a dollop of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and transparent, with a good core, fine-grained tannins, bright acids and very good length and grip on the well-balanced and vibrant finish. This is 12.5 percent octane and a lovely middleweight, with a surprising touch of sappiness in the core, but make sure you decant it prior to serving, to allow it to blossom properly. 2016-2035. **89+**.

**2014 Pinot Noir- Bench Wines (Sonoma Coast)**

The 2014 Pinot Noir from Bench Wines is a classic middleweight, with a light ruby color and very civilized 13.8 percent alcohol. The bouquet is bright and expressive, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, sweet beetroot, gentle smokiness, a touch of Sonoma herb tones, rose petals and a very nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, light on its feet and really intensely flavored, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, primary and tangy finish. This really has good backend energy, and though it is quite approachable out of the blocks, it is still early days for this fine bottle of pinot and a few years in the cellar will pay handsome dividends. At \$24 per bottle, this is cheaper than a lot of Bourgogne Rouge bottlings these days and a superb value! 2018-2035+. **89+**.

**2014 Pinot Noir “Laguna Vineyard”- Daniel (Russian River Valley)**

The 2014 Laguna Vineyard pinot noir from Daniel is a superb example of the vintage. The wine includes one-third whole clusters, was fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in one-third new oak puncheons (500 liter casks). These are not old vines, as they were only planted in 2008, but have been farmed organically since day one. The bouquet on the 2014 is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a musky blend of cherries, beetroot, a touch of raw cocoa, mustard seed, woodsmoke and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish

and intensely flavored, with excellent focus and bounce, nascent complexity and a very long, tangy and modestly tannic finish. This is 13.4 percent octane and really a beautifully balanced and classy bottle of young pinot noir. Just add three or four years of bottle age to allow its secondary layers of complexity to fully emerge. 2020-2045+. **91+**.

**2014 Pinot Noir “Grand Vent Vineyard”- Daniel (Sonoma Coast)**

The 2014 Grand Vent Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Daniel is outstanding, as it beautifully synthesizes this prime vintage with the cooler fruit tones of this well-situated and windy vineyard in the Petaluma Gap. The wine was fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in forty percent new oak, with its alcohol coming in at a cool 13.1 percent. The bouquet is deep, pure and refined, offering up a fine mix of sappy cherries, red plums, a touch of blood orange, cocoa, a lovely base of soil, a hint of fresh nutmeg, woodsmoke and a gentle base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and impressively light on its feet, with an excellent core of fruit, fine-grained tannins, lovely balance and grip and a long, nascently complex and very energetic finish. This is a superb bottle in the making! 2020-2050. **93**.

**2014 Pinot Noir “Ferrington Vineyard”- Daniel (Mendocino County)**

Long-time fans of Williams-Selyem will recognize the name of Ferrington Vineyard, as Burt and Ed made some lovely wines from this vineyard during the course of their tenure at their Sonoma winery. The 2014 from Daniel comes in at a cool and well-measured 12.9 percent octane and was raised in forty percent new wood. As is the case with all of these excellent Daniel Pinot Noirs, the wine was fermented with indigenous yeasts and finished its malolactic fermentation in cask. The very complex bouquet on the 2014 Ferrington is stellar, wafting from the glass in a classy and gently musky blend of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of hazelnut, beautiful soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of mustard seed, raw cocoa, fresh nutmeg, rose petals and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and tangy, with great intensity of flavor, lovely transparency, ripe acids, moderate tannins and absolutely superb focus and grip on the very long and vibrant finish. This superb young pinot noir has not yet fully integrated its new oak component and needs time to do so in the cellar, but it is so beautiful to drink right now that it is going to be very tempting to drink the wine sooner, rather than later. I would exercise self-restraint and tuck this excellent wine away in the cellar for at least another four or five years, as it promises to be absolutely outstanding when it reaches its full apogee. Truly stellar juice. 2020-2050. **93+**.

**2014 Pinot Noir “Un”- Division Wine Company (Willamette Valley)**

The 2014 Pinot Noir “Un” from the Division Wine Company is the only blended bottling that they produce from this varietal, with six different vineyards contributing to the cuvée in the 2014 vintage, with all of the vines farmed either organically or biodynamically. A couple of the vineyard sources were fermented with a bit of whole clusters and the wine was raised in fifteen percent new oak for ten months prior to *assemblage* and bottling. The 2014 bottling comes in at 13.2 percent octane and offers up a refined and primary bouquet of black cherries, plums, dark soil tones, a touch of chicory, gentle spice tones, woodsmoke and a discreet touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely structured, with a fine core, ripe, moderate tannins, good acids and fine balance and grip on the long and youthful finish. This is still a puppy and needs some time in the cellar to blossom, but it will be a lovely example with a bit of bottle age. 2020-2045+. **90+**.

**2014 Pinot Noir “Temperance Hill Vineyard” Trois- Division Wine (Eola & Amity Hills)**

The 2014 Temperance Hill bottling of Pinot Noir, which the folks at Division Wine Company have designated as “Trois”, comes in at 13.4 percent octane and was raised in a fifty-

fifty combination of one year-old casks and older barrels. The wine is a bit reductive when first opened, but with air, blossoms nicely to offer up a complex blend of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of anise, charred wood, dark soil tones, balsam boughs and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, black fruity and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, ripe, suave tannins and a very long, balanced and still quite primary finish. This wine is built for the cellar, and if you are going to drink it in its youth, give it thirty minutes in the decanter to blossom a bit. 2020-2045+. **91+**.

**2014 Pinot Noir “Armstrong Vineyard” Cinq- Division Wine Company (Ribbon Ridge)**

There were three casks of the 2014 Armstrong Vineyard pinot noir from Division produced, with one of the barrels new. These are not old vines, as the pinot here was only planted in 2007. The wine is a touch reductive when first opened and needs some decanting to blossom, but eventually offers up a fine nose of black cherries, raw cocoa, gentle smokiness, a fine base of soil, discreet vanillin oak and a touch of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and tightly-knit, with a good core, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and still quite shut down finish. I hope the reduction here will eventually fade away completely, but for the present, one has to work around it a bit to see the fine bottle underneath. 2021-2040+. **87-91?**

**2014 Pinot Noir- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)**

The 2014 Domaine Drouhin regular bottling of pinot noir is a lovely bottle, offering up a ripe and complex nose of strawberries, cherries, a touch of beetroot, lovely spice tones, a fine base of soil, fresh thyme and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still fairly youthful, with a nicely sappy core of fruit, fine-grained tannins, good acids and fine length and grip on the primary finish. This wine is 14.1 percent octane and could use a year or two in bottle to absorb its new wood, as the tannins are not yet completely integrated, but the wine is well-balanced and will be superb once it has had a chance to blossom with cellaring. 2020-2045. **91+**.

**2014 Pinot Noir- Domaine Nicolas Jay (Willamette Valley)**

Domaine Nicolas Jay is the new Oregon project that Jean-Nicolas Méo is involved with and the 2014 is their first release of a pinot noir. The wine is 13.6 percent octane, with all of the fruit sourced from the Bishop Creek Vineyard, which was planted in 1988 and 1989. The wine was raised in one-third new oak in this vintage and offers up a bright and youthful bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of fresh thyme, a lovely base of soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and quite elegant in profile, with lovely silkiness on the attack, a good core and fine length and grip on the modestly tannic finish. Good juice and a very auspicious beginning! 2019-2040. **91**.

**2014 Pinot Noir “Estate”- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)**

The fruit for the 2014 Pinot Noir “Estate” bottling from Johan Vineyards hails all from their biodynamically farmed vineyard. The wine comes in at 13.2 percent octane and offers up a pure and nascently complex bouquet of red plums, cherries, cocoa powder, a touch of fresh herbs, a stylish base of soil, bonfire and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is focused, medium-full and tangy, with fine transparency, a good core, modest tannins, good acids and fine length and grip on the still slightly weedy, youthful finish. This is quite approachable today, but it is still quite young and I would opt for tucking it away in the cellar for at least a few years and allow its secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. Good juice. 2018-2040. **90+**.

**2014 Pinot Noir- Mindego Ridge (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

The 2014 Pinot Noir from Mindego Ridge is produced from their own estate grown fruit. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, raised in twenty-five percent new wood and bottled unfinned and unfiltered, with the 2014 vintage producing a wine at 13.6 percent alcohol. The bouquet is a pretty and gently ripe blend of black cherries, dark chocolate, a nice base of soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a good, sappy core of fruit, good shape and balance, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the finish. This is a very nicely made example of pinot noir, but it lacks just a bit of complexity to rate outstanding. 2016-2030+. **89.**

**2014 Pinot Noir “Willamette Valley”- Omero Cellars**

The 2014 Pinot Noir “Willamette Valley” from Omero Cellars is excellent, coming in at a very civilized thirteen percent octane and reveling in its purity of fruit and soil expression. This bottling includes some purchased grapes, to go along with fruit from the estate vineyard on Ribbon Ridge. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classy blend of black cherries, pomegranate, raw cocoa, a lovely base of soil tones, hints of the cola to come, a touch of cedar and a fine topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with marvelous transparency, fine-grained tannins, good acids and great backend focus and grip on the pure and nascently complex finish. This wine is so beautifully balanced that it is all too easy to drink it out of the blocks, but there are some great constituent components here and I really want to see what it is going to do with a bit of bottle age! 2016-2035+. **92.**

**2014 Pinot Noir “Ribbon Ridge”- Omero Cellars (Yamhill County)**

The 2014 Ribbon Ridge bottling of pinot noir from Omero Cellars is outstanding, with the fruit from this hailing from the estate vineyard that David Moore put in here in 2009. The wine is an even thirteen percent octane and offers up a black fruity aromatic constellation of black cherries, a touch of blueberry, cola, dark soil tones, a touch of allspice, a deft framing of new wood and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very soil-driven in personality, with lovely sappiness in the mid-palate, impeccable focus and balance, suave tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is a touch more structured than the above wine, as well as a bit more depth at the core, but it is equally poised and accessible. Like the 2014 Willamette Valley bottling, this wine is very approachable today, but will age very well indeed and I cannot wait to see what it tastes like with some evolution in the bottle! Fine, fine juice. 2018-2040. **93.**

**2014 Pinot Noir “Johan Vineyard”- Origin Wines (Willamette Valley)**

The 2014 Johan Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Origin Wines is outstanding, coming in at 13.2 percent octane and including one-third whole clusters. The 2014 was raised in one-third new wood and offers up a superb bouquet of red plums, black cherries, a touch of raw cocoa, gentle smokiness, a touch of meatiness, a discreet base of vanillin oak and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and velvety on the attack, with nice sappiness at the core, a touch of weediness, bright acids, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the fairly ripe finish. This is a very, very pretty pinot noir in the making, which is eminently approachable today, but still fairly primary and will be even better with a bit of bottle age to allow its secondary layers on the palate to emerge. 2020-2045+. **92.**

**2014 Pinot Noir “Meredith Mitchell Vineyard”- Origin Wines (McMinnville)**

The Meredith Mitchell Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Origin Wines hails from the original pinot vines planted here in 1988. It is a bit riper than the winery’s Johan Vineyard bottling, coming in at an even fourteen percent octane, and it too was raised in one-third new

oak. The wine is excellent on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a deep and complex mix of black cherries, plums, dark chocolate, a touch of spices meats, cola, lovely soil tones and a deft framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, a very good soil signature, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex and suavely tannic finish. This is still on the young side, and despite its very real accessibility today, it should be tucked away in the cellar for at least a few years, as it is going to be a dynamite bottle of pinot noir! 2020-2050. **93.**

**2014 Pinot Noir “Nysa Vineyard”- Origin Wines (Dundee Hills)**

The 2014 Pinot Noir “Nysa Vineyard” bottling from Origin Wines is a young, fairly ripe, but a precise and black fruity example of the vintage, coming in at a pretty hefty 14.8 percent octane. The vineyard is a high elevation parcel, with very little topsoil, but enough clay to retain moisture and allow the vines to be dry-farmed. The 2014 from Origin wafts from the glass in a youthfully complex aromatic constellation of black cherries, woodsmoke, incipient notes of cola, lovely spice tones, dark soil and a fair bit of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and primary, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, moderate tannins and a bit of backend heat poking out on the long and nascently complex finish. I love the inherent complexity of this wine, but would have loved to have seen it just a touch lower in octane, which perhaps the 2015 will show. 2019-2045. **88.**

**2014 Pinot Noir- Roserock (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The first vintage of pinot noir from the Drouhin family’s new Roserock project is quite lovely in 2014. The wine offers up a deep and youthful nose that still shows a bit of whole cluster influence in its complex mix of red and black cherries, vinesmoke, lovely dark soil tones, a dollop of fresh thyme and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and nicely sappy at the core, with fine transparency, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and impeccable balance on the long, focused and very promising finish. This wine shows superb backend energy and will be dynamite with a bit of bottle age. A very auspicious beginning! 2020-2050. **92+.**

**2014 Pinot Noir “Zéphirine”- Roserock (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The 2014 Zéphirine cuvée of pinot noir from Roserock is a barrel selection of the top lots from the vintage with thirteen hundred cases produced in this vintage. The bouquet is pure, sappy and very refined, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of pomegranate, black cherries, raw cocoa, gorgeous soil tones, woodsmoke, just a touch of the stems and a superb base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and sappy at the core, with outstanding soil signature, ripe, suave tannins, tangy acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, seamless and vibrant finish. This is so beautifully balanced that it is very approachable out of the blocks, but this superb wine is built for the cellar and really deserves to be tucked away for at least seven to ten years before starting to open bottles. Véronique Drouhin has made some absolutely beautiful bottles of pinot noir since she arrived in Oregon, but this is the finest I have yet had a chance to taste from the Oregon chapter of the book of Drouhin! *Chapeau!* 2022-2060. **95.**





#### **2014 Pinot Noir “Wiley Vineyard”- Terragena (Anderson Valley)**

The 2014 Wiley Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Terragena is a cool and classy customer, coming in at an even thirteen percent octane and offering up lovely red fruity tones and plenty of transparency. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classically weedy, Anderson Valley mix of cherries, strawberries, fresh thyme, mustard seed, coffee, dollop of cedar and a superb base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and youthfully structured, with fine intensity of flavor at the core, impressive soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is really a fine bottle of pinot noir in the making, but I would opt for tucking it away in the cellar for at least a few years and let some of these weedy Anderson Valley elements morph into fine, savory notes with a bit of bottle age. I have no difficulties drinking this wine out of the blocks myself, but for those who want to steer clear of this bit of youthful *herbacité*, just give the wine a bit of bottle age! Fine potential. 2020-2045+. 92.

#### **2014 Pinot Noir “Seven and Baby”- Teutonic Wine Company (Willamette Valley)**

The 2014 Pinot Noir “Seven and Baby” from the Teutonic Wine Company is a typically low octane offering from this Germanic-inspired winery, tipping the scales at a robust 13.1 percent alcohol. The wine is nicely pure and sappy on the nose, offering up scents of cherries, quince, rose petals, woodsmoke, a touch of orange peel, fresh thyme and a fine, fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and youthfully structured, with nice intensity of flavor in the mid-palate, moderate tannins, tangy acids and fine length and grip on the focused and still primary finish. This is still a young wine and really deserves five to seven years in the

cellar to blossom properly. It is an excellent bottle of low fat pinot noir that should drink beautifully with some bottle age. 2021-2045+. **91+**.

### **2013 Pinot Noir “Atavus Vineyard”- Analemma Winery (Columbia Gorge)**

The 2013 Pinot Noir “Atavus Vineyard” from Analemma Winery draws upon one of the coolest vineyards in Oregon. The vineyard sits at an elevation of 1600 to 1800 feet above sea level and was cleared and planted between 1968 and 1971, which also makes this some of the oldest vines in the state. The wine comes in at 12.3 percent alcohol and offers up a youthfully complex bouquet of black cherries, a touch of cassis, lovely notes of fresh thyme, chicory, a whisper of cedar and a superb base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and very intensely flavored, with impressive depth at the core, fine focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, still fairly primary finish. This has fine backend lift and will be a terrific bottle with a bit more bottle age, but it is still a tad on the young side and could do with a few years in the cellar to develop more of its secondary layers of complexity. It is a very stylish wine that packs a ton of personality in a very svelte, low octane package. Impressive! I should mention that the wine is pretty tightly-knit when first opened and blossoms notably if given a good half an hour in decanter prior to serving. 2018-2035+. **91+**.

### **2013 Pinot Noir “Rapley Trail Vineyard”- Thomas Fogarty (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

It had been a half year since I last saw a bottle of the 2013 Rapley Trail Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Thomas Fogarty, and the wine has blossomed quite nicely over that time. Readers may recall that the wine was quite tight upon release, but it has started to flesh out nicely and is showing even finer potential than it did out of the blocks. I had observed that this might well be the case in my note on the wine back in the spring and I am happy to report that the wine has really started to express itself on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a lovely blend of plums, cherries, raw cocoa, a touch of mustard seed, a fine base of dark soil, incipient notes of gamebird and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip, still a bit of backend tannin and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Lovely juice. 2021-2050+. **92**.

### **2013 Pinot Noir “Nils”- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)**

The “Nils” bottling of pinot noir from Johan Vineyards hails from a section of their vines where the exposition is eastward and the fruit tends to ripen superbly and the resulting wine is built for long-term cellaring. The winery supports the fruit’s predilections for longevity by extracting just a bit more in the cellar to produce one of the longest-lived cuvées in their lineup. The 2013 Nils is a cool and classy customer, coming in at 12.2 percent octane and offering up a very pure and precise bouquet of sweet black plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and tangy, with nice intensity of flavor, lovely focus and grip, a moderate chassis of tannin and very good length and grip on the nascently complex and youthful finish. This shows its modest ripeness a bit, but there are good things going on here as well and it is not short on intensity of flavor. 2016-2030+. **88+**.

### **2013 Pinot Noir “Three Barrel”- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)**

The 2013 Three Barrel Pinot Noir from Johan Vineyards is as low octane as the Nils bottling in this vintage, but packs more depth and backend vibrancy on the palate than the above. As the name suggests, this is a barrel selection cuvée of what the team at Johan Vineyards finds the highest quality in any given year. The bouquet on the 2013 is pure, complex and very classy, jumping from the glass in a blaze of strawberries, cherries, delicate spice tones, a superb base of

soil, a touch of cedary and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, focused and nascently complex, with still a touch of youthful stems to work through, modest tannins, tangy, perfectly integrated acids and lovely intensity of flavor on the long, complex and refined finish. This is a very lovely middleweight in the making. 201602940. **91.**

**2013 Pinot Noir “Horseshoe Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

Over the course of the year since I last tasted a bottle of the 2013 Horseshoe Vineyard pinot noir from Rhys, the wine has closed down quite noticeably and is now hunkered down for a prolonged period of hibernation. The manifest quality of the wine is still very much in evidence on both the nose and palate, but this wine is now shut down and in need of some extended cellaring time. The bouquet offers up a reserved blend of red and black cherries, beetroot, a very complex base of stony soil, a youthful touch of its stems, mustard seed and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core, impeccable focus and balance, lovely soil signature and a long, ripely tannic and very primary finish. This is going to be an excellent bottle, but let it sleep! 2022-2055+. **93+.**

**2012 Pinot Noir “Four Winds Vineyard”- Crowley Vineyards**

The 2012 vintage was the first that Crowley Vineyards produced a pinot noir bottling from the Four Winds Vineyard, after having purchased chardonnay here for a couple of years previous. The wine is 13.7 percent octane, included twenty percent whole clusters in the fermentation and offers up a lovely bouquet of bing cherries, pomegranate, fresh herb tones, a fine base of soil, a touch of raw cocoa and a very discreet framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and nicely transparent, with a fine sappy core, moderate tannins, tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the bouncy finish that closes with a nice note of beetroot. This is lovely pinot that is approachable today, but will be even better with a bit of bottle age. 2016-2035+. **92+.**

**2012 Pinot Noir “Cuvée Laurène”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)**

The 2012 Cuvée Laurène from Domaine Drouhin is a fine example of the vintage, offering up a ripe and very pure bouquet of cherries, red plums, a touch of cocoa powder, still a whisper of the whole cluster influence, a fine base of soil, a touch of mustard seed and a discreet base of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, fine-grained tannins, tangy acids and very good focus and grip on the ripe and ever so slightly warm finish. This is listed at 14.1 percent octane, but given the shape of the vintage, it might be just a touch higher in this year. At age four, this is still a puppy and in need of some extended time in the cellar, but it will be a really lovely wine when it has reached its peak. 2020-2050. **92+.**

**2011 Pinot Noir “Medici Vineyard”- Holden Wine Company (Willamette Valley)**

This was the very first pinot noir that Sterling Whitted produced under his Holden Wine Company label, and it certainly augured good things to come. He bought enough fruit to produce two barrels of this high-toned 2011 middleweight and I am honored to have been sent a bottle to taste. The wine comes in at an even twelve percent octane and shows a touch of stems in its vibrant bouquet of strawberries, quince, plenty of fresh herb tones, a fine base of soil and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, low fat and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty and slightly peppery finish. This is one of those really high-toned, transparent, low octane wines that seems a touch malnourished when one first starts tasting it, but as it gets a little air, it starts to flesh out nicely and works very well at the table. This was a very cool vintage in Oregon and it shows here, but there is still a lot to

like in this complex and very honest representation of the 2011 vintage. It is not a great wine, but it is very good in its soil-driven, tangy style. 2016-2026+. **88.**

**2008 Pinot Noir “Nils Reserve”- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)**

The 2008 Pinot Noir “Nils Reserve” from Johan Vineyards is a bit riper than the 2013 version, coming in at 12.8 percent octane and offering up a lovely, black fruity bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of hundred year-old *balsamico*, coffee bean, dark soil tones, fresh nutmeg and a nice touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and quite structured, with a good core of fruit, a fair bit of firm tannin and very good focus and grip on the long and still very youthful finish. Clearly, this was an era where more extraction was practiced at Johan Vineyards and it will be interesting to see how this wine eventually blossoms. My gut feeling is that this will be very tasty in another five to seven years, but that it will never have quite the same style and transparent grace as the wines produced here in more recent vintages. 2020-2040+. **89.**

**2008 Pinot Noir “Three Barrel”- Johan Vineyards (Willamette Valley)**

The 2008 vintage of Three Barrel pinot noir from Johan Vineyards is another fairly extracted version of pinot noir that is a fair bit removed from the beautifully transparent and more delicate-styled wines that they are producing today. The wine is 12.8 percent in alcohol and nicely focused and pure, but also quite notably extracted in personality, delivering a nascently complex nose of black cherries, dark berries, a bit of grilled meat, dark chocolate, soil and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and a bit marked by its new oak, with a touch of lead pencil dryness on the backend. The core is sound and deep, the tannins are well-integrated, but overall, this is a surprisingly extracted and chewy example of pinot noir that seems completely out of place with what the winery is producing today. *Viva la difference!* 2022-2035+? **87+?**

***Syrah and Grenache***

**2015 Syrah “Dion Vineyard”- Golden Cluster (Willamette Valley)**

The 2015 Syrah “Dion Vineyard” from Golden Cluster was made in very small quantities (sixty-five cases), but is an outstanding example and well worth a search of the market to locate a few bottles. The wine is 13.5 percent in alcohol, includes a small percentage of grenache in the blend (as there is a single row of grenache in the vineyard alongside the syrah and the winery decided to blend it all together), and was fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in older puncheons. The wine offers up a vibrant nose of black raspberries, roasted meats, chocolate, a touch of new leather, pepper and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a sappy core, a fair bit of backend tannin and very good length and grip on the youthful finish. There is a touch of VA here, but I really like the raw materials and the wine just needs a bit of time to blossom, as it is quite primary today. 2020-2040+. **89+.**

**2015 Grenache “Solero Vineyard”- Minimus (Applegate Valley)**

The remote Solero Vineyard was planted in 2007 with grenache cuttings originating at Château de Beaucastel. The soil here is stony and granitic, with vigor naturally limited by the wild and edgy microclimate. The 2015 from Minimus offers up a superb bouquet of raspberries, cherries, *garrigue*, bonfire, cloves, pepper and stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and far more peppery on the palate than the nose suggests, with a fine core, excellent transparency, well-integrated, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and quite ripe finish. This wine is 13.9 percent alcohol, which is fairly standard for grenache, but it does not show a

bit of *sur maturité* on the nose and is very well-balanced on the palate. This is drinkable today, but I would be inclined to give it some bottle age and allow the tannins to soften further. 2020-2045. **92.**

**2015 SM-3 “Syrah”- Minimus (Applegate Valley)**

Chad Stock likes to label his Minimus wines with codes for each experimental lot, as his philosophy is that each wine, each year is a unique experiment. The SM-3 does not mention that it is syrah on the label, but happily, Chad sent me the tech sheet on the wine, which comes in at 12.8 percent alcohol and was made entirely with whole clusters and raised in one-third new oak. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up a youthful blend of black raspberry, black olive, woodsmoke, pepper, lovely spice tones, a bit of roasted meat and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a good core, fine transparency, moderate tannins and a very long, complex finish. This is first class, low fat syrah that will age beautifully, but is going to be hard not to drink young, as it is accessible and delicious out of the blocks. It would make Éric Texier proud! 2020-2045. **93+.**

**2013 Syrah “Stella Maris Vineyard”- Art and Science Winery (Applegate Valley- Oregon)**

Art and Science is the winery owned by Dan Rinke and Kim Hamblin, who also produce ciders and perry. The 2013 Syrah “Stella Maris Vineyard” from Art and Science comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a nascently complex and quite classy nose of cassis, black raspberry, pepper, roasted gamebird, soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and quite soil-driven in personality, with a fine core, suave, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex finish. I really like the understated and low fat style of this syrah, which does not jump out of the glass at one, but with a bit of concentration, reveals very impressive depth and complexity. It is certainly approachable today, but will be better with a few years in the cellar. Good juice. 2019-2030+. **90.**

**2013 “Black Locust” Syrah “Stella Maris Vineyard”- Minimus (Applegate Valley- Oregon)**

The 2013 Black Locust bottling from Chad Stock is designated as Number 15 in his experimental lots, and this wine was an attempt to get some of the aromatic complexity of viognier in the blend with syrah by using once-used acacia barrels for the *elevage* of the wine. As Chad’s technical notes observe, it “turns out that acacia is very tannic wood and 100 percent whole cluster syrah is very tannic” and “the two together meant that we needed to age this big boy in bottle for a few years before it was released.” Clearly the wine is starting to nicely calm down structurally and is not particularly tannic today, but offers up a deep and classy nose of cassis, hung game, pepper, a touch of dark chocolate, a nice base of soil and the acacia wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine focus, a fair bit of well-integrated tannins and very good length and grip on the finish. This does not have quite the same breed and personality of the 2015 Minimus Syrah. 2023-2045+. **90.**

***Merlot***

**2013 Merlot “Estate”- Ridge Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

This bottling hails from merlot planted in the Monte Bello vineyard and the 2013 comes in at 13.8 percent octane. It was raised entirely in American oak (as is customary at Ridge), of which sixty percent was new in this vintage. The wine offers up a lovely nose of dark berries, cassis, bitter chocolate, a touch of saddle leather, a superb base of soil and a touch of spicy American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and modestly tannic, with lovely focus and grip, a good core and a long, classy finish. Fine juice. 2019-2040. **92.**



### **2012 Merlot- Mayacamas Vineyards (Mount Veeder)**

The 2012 vintage was the last one harvested and vinified by Bob Travers at Mayacamas, with the wine finished by Andy Erickson when he arrived as winemaker at Mayacamas with new owner Charles Banks. The wine is utterly classic in style (albeit, perhaps showing just a bit more cedary oak than past vintages), offering up a pure and nascently complex bouquet of black cherries, cigar smoke, beautiful soil tones and a touch of currant leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and properly reserved structurally (in the true Mayacamas style), with a good core, fine detail and grip and a long, moderately tannic and very well-balanced finish. This is a lovely, grown up bottle of Merlot that will need a couple of years in the cellar to start to show some of its secondary layers of complexity. Fine juice. 2019-2040+. **91+**.



### ***Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux-Styled Blends***

#### **2014 Cabernet Sauvignon “Knight’s Valley”- Bench Wines (Sonoma)**

The 2014 Knight’s Valley cabernet from Bench Wines is excellent and impressively low octane, coming in at 13.8 percent alcohol in this vintage. Bench is the entry level line from Brack Mountain Winery, who produces several different labels from their vineyards in Sonoma County. The 2014 Knight’s Valley cabernet offers up a lovely and impressively red fruity bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil, gentle spice tones and a discreet base of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and elegantly styled, with a lovely core of

fruit, fine soil inflection, fine-grained, seamless tannins and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. This is quite accessible and tasty out of the blocks, but this is proper old school cabernet and it will be even better down the road with a few years in the cellar to develop its secondary layers of complexity. A very impressive cabernet and an outstanding value, as this excellent wine retails for under twenty dollars per bottle! 2020-2045. **91+**.

**2013 Cabernet Sauvignon “Mays’ Discovery Vineyard”- Andrew Will (Horse Heaven Hills)**

The 2013 Mays’ Discovery Vineyard bottling of cabernet sauvignon from Chris Camarda is a touch riper than its predecessor, coming in at 14.5 percent octane, but offers up impressive purity on the nose and palate and does not show any signs of heat on the backend. The bouquet is deep, primary and very promising, offering up scents of cassis, sweet dark berries, espresso, cigar ash, dark soil tones and a judicious framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely generous on the attack, with excellent focus and grip, a fine core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and very poised finish. Fine juice. 2020-2050. **92+**.

**2013 Cabernet Sauvignon “Esploso”- Andrew Will (Columbia Valley)**

The new Esploso bottling of cabernet sauvignon from Andrew Will Winery is the debut wine from Chris Camarda’s son, Will Camarda, and the wine is a very impressive first effort. The grapes for this bottling hail from some of the estate’s top sources, with seventy-five percent of the blend coming from Champoux Vineyard, fifteen percent from Ciel du Cheval Vineyard and ten percent from Two Blondes Vineyard. The wine is 14.5 percent octane and offers up a fine, primary bouquet of cassis, cigar ash, tobacco leaf, a fine base of gravelly soil tones, just a whisper of menthol and a fair bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, fine-grained tannins and a very long, focused and promising finish. This will need some time in the cellar to blossom, but it will be outstanding. Welcome to the big time Will Camarda! 2022-2050. **92**.

**2013 Champoux Vineyard- Andrew Will (Horse Heaven Hills)**

The 2013 vintage from Champoux Vineyard is composed of a blend of forty-four percent merlot, twenty-nine percent cabernet franc, eighteen percent cabernet sauvignon, and nine percent of a mix of petit verdot and malbec. The *cépages* relies more on merlot than last year’s version, which was fully sixty-four percent cabernet franc, but this is the beauty of Chris Camarda’s wines, as he is able to lean more heavily on the grapes that excel in any given vintage, rather than being locked into some specific ratio. The wine comes in this year at a riper 14.5 percent and delivers a really superb and complex bouquet of black plums, dark berries, Cuban cigars, gravelly soil tones, dark chocolate and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core, ripe, seamless tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex and focused finish. This is a lovely wine that seems likely to drink a bit on the earlier side (by the long-lived standards of this cuvée), as the combination of a fairly high percentage of merlot this year and the riper octane level should make it start to really sing with about four or five years’ worth of bottle age. However, its fine balance will still carry it far into the future. 2020-2045+. **93**.

**2013 Ciel du Cheval Vineyard- Andrew Will (Red Mountain)**

The 2013 Ciel du Cheval bottling from Chris Camarda is a blend of fifty-six percent merlot and forty-four percent cabernet franc, with no cabernet sauvignon included in the *cépages* this year. The wine is listed at 14.5 percent octane, but seems perhaps just a touch riper this year, as the nose offers up a succulent blend of sweet cassis, a touch of black raspberry, coffee



grounds, charred wood, dark soil tones, a touch of balsam bough and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely focused, with an excellent core, good soil signature and a long, moderately tannic and ever so slightly warm finish. There is a slight grittiness to the texture of the tannins this year, which I attribute to the heat of the summer, but I like this wine quite well, as there is depth, breed and complexity. The ripeness this year will give the wine a potential opulence that will be quite attractive, but may also rob it of just a bit of longevity on the far side of its plateau. 2021-2045. **91+**.

**2013 Two Blondes Vineyard- Andrew Will (Yakima Valley)**

The 2013 Two Blondes Vineyard from Andrew Will Winery is a lovely wine that beautifully synthesizes the ripeness of the vintage with the elegance and structural integrity one finds so often in this bottling. The *cépages* this year is forty-four percent merlot, thirty-four percent cabernet sauvignon and twenty-two percent cabernet franc. The bouquet is pure and classy, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar smoke, a lovely base of soil, a touch of smoky oak and a nice topnote of dark chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a plush core of fruit, ripe, chewy tannins and fine length and grip on the slightly warm finish. This too is listed at 14,5 percent alcohol and is well-balanced, but also emblematic of its vintage. Like the Ciel du Cheval 2013, there is just a slight touch of grittiness to the tannins' texture this year, due to the heat of the summer. 2021-2045. **92.**

**2013 Sorella- Andrew Will (Horse Heaven Hills)**

The 2013 vintage of Sorella is once again based primarily on cabernet sauvignon, which is a strength in this hot summer, as this grape tended to ripe later and really had a chance to develop more complexity over the last few weeks of hang time. The Sorella blend this year is seventy-eight percent cabernet sauvignon, ten percent merlot, six percent cabernet franc and the remainder a mix of malbec and petit verdot. The bouquet is deep, pure and nicely reserved in profile (a rarity in the 2013 vintage), offering up a complex constellation of cassis, dark berry, espresso, a touch of tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, cigar smoke, currant leaf and a discreet framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with ripe, well-integrated tannins, excellent balance and grip and a very long, nascently complex and very classy finish. This does not share the touch of opulence of the other Andrew Will 2013s, as this has the sophisticated structure and purity that was the hallmark of the previous vintage here. By the way, this also is listed at 14.5 percent octane, but carries its alcohol very well indeed. A great wine in the making. 2023-2065. **94+**.

**2013 Cabernet Sauvignon- l'Oliveto (Sonoma County)**

The 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon from l'Oliveto is produced from fruit sourced in Knight's Valley and on Sonoma Mountain. The wine delivers excellent depth and nascent complexity in its bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, a fine base of dark soil, a nice touch of smoked meats, raw cocoa, incipient notes of dried eucalyptus and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and fairly structured in style, with a sappy core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent focus and balance on the long and still quite youthful finish. This is listed at 13.7 percent octane and might be just a touch higher, but is really nicely built for the cellar and will be a superb bottle with sufficient bottle age. This is only \$30 per bottle and really harkens back to the 1980s, when one could get serious cabernet for cellaring in this price range. Impressive juice. 2023-2050. **92.**

### **2013 Cabernet Sauvignon “Estate”- Ridge Vineyards (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

The 2013 Estate bottling of cabernet bottling from Ridge is a blend of seventy-five percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty percent merlot, three percent petit verdot and two percent cabernet franc, with all of the grapes hailing from the Monte Bello vineyard. The grapes were fermented with native yeasts and raised in forty-eight percent new oak, with the balance a blend of one and two wine casks. The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a youthful blend of cassis, dark berries, cigars smoke, dark soil tones and lead pencil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, a fair bit of backend tannin and a long, well-balanced finish. This is still in the process of fully integrating its oak component, but will do so seamlessly over the next few years and is a really lovely bottle in the making. 2023-2060+. **92.**

### **2013 Father and Son Blend “Holden-Mapley Vineyard”- Terragena (Alexander Valley)**

Terragena is the brainchild of winemaker Chris Buchanan, whose home base vineyard is located in Humboldt County and is planted to chardonnay and pinot noir. The 2013 Terragena “Father and Son Blend” is produced from purchased grapes from the Holden-Mapley Vineyard in Alexander Valley and is comprised of a mix of fifty-four percent cabernet franc and forty-six percent cabernet sauvignon. The wine is a cool 12.7 percent octane and offers up a pure and nascently complex bouquet of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, a fine base of dark soil tones, just a whisper of the chipotles to come and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and complex, with a nice core, impressive intensity of flavor, suave, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the low fat and classy finish. This is not a big wine, but it is long on personality and complexity and really is very enjoyable to drink now, with the potential to also age very nicely over the mid-term. 2016-2030+. **90+.**

### **2012 Cabernet Sauvignon “Napa”- Heitz Wine Cellars**

The current release of the Napa cabernet bottling from Heitz is excellent and classically built for a nice, long evolution in bottle. The bouquet is deep, pure and classic, offering up scents of red and black cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, cigar wrapper, a touch of red curry and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely ripe, with a fine core, impeccable balance, suave, fine-grained tannins and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. This is certainly accessible today, but it will be better down the road, when it is has some time in the cellar to develop its secondary layers of complexity. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2040. **91+.**

### **2012 Cabernet Sauvignon “Estate”- Kathryn Kennedy Winery (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

The 2012 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon from Kathryn Kennedy is plenty ripe, tipping the scales at a full 14.9 percent alcohol and, not surprisingly, is a bit hot on the backend. The bouquet is deep and ripe, offering up scents of boysenberry, black cherries, cigar smoke, dark soil and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with chewy tannins, good focus and a long, moderately hot and youthful finish. This might have been really good at a lower octane, but it is quite cuspy in terms of balance. The tannins need at least a few years to soften up a bit, but who knows how the balance of the wine will be with some bottle age, as this is an awful lot of alcohol to successfully manage over even the medium-term. 2019-2035? **87?**

### **2012 Cabernet Sauvignon- Mayacamas Vineyards (Mount Veeder)**

The 2012 Mayacamas cabernet sauvignon comes in at a cool 13.2 percent octane and offers up a deep and properly reserved bouquet of red and black cherries, tobacco leaf, dark soil

tones, cigar ash, a touch of dried eucalyptus, discreet notes of the chipotles to come, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, focused and nicely structured, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the youthful finish. This is a classic in the making and will need a good fifteen years of bottle age to start to stir, and should prove to be another very long-lived Mayacamas cabernet. Fine juice. 2027-2075. **93.**



**2006 Cabernet Sauvignon “Trailside Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars (Napa)**

The 2006 vintage of Trailside Vineyard cabernet from Heitz is really outstanding, with the youthful nose starting to show some secondary elements in its mix of red and black cherries, a touch of mint, cigar wrapper, lovely Stag’s Leap spice tones, a fine base of soil and just a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a nice sense of sappiness in reserve, suave tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long and very well-balanced finish. This is still a few years away from fully blossoming, but all of the constituent components are in place for a long and very high quality plateau of peak maturity. 2020-2050+. **93+.**

**2005 Cabernet Sauvignon “Bella Oaks Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars (Napa)**

The 2005 vintage of Bella Oaks cabernet is one of the finest that I have ever tasted from the Heitz family. This is one of the last vintages that the winery produced from this vineyard, as after the 2007 harvest, the Rhodes family began to sell the fruit to other producers. The ’05 Bella

Oaks is now drinking beautifully at age eleven, soaring from the glass in a complex blend of cherry, blood orange, cigar wrapper, superb soil tones, a touch of vanillin oak and a lovely blend of spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, suave and already very complex, with fine focus and grip, a sappy core, melting tannins and excellent balance and grip on the long and energetic finish. This is a terrific bottle of cabernet that is just starting to enter into its plateau of peak maturity, but will age long and gracefully as well. 2016-2040. **94.**

**2003 Cabernet Sauvignon “Trailside Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars (Napa)**

The 2003 vintage of Trailside from Heitz is a very good wine, but it cannot quite keep pace with the 2006 version. The bouquet offers up a classy blend of cherries, a touch of mint, a nice base of soil, allspice and a bit of cedary wood in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely complex, with good, but not great depth at the core, melting tannins and lovely focus and grip on the poised and well-balanced finish. It is only the slight dip in the mid-palate here that keeps its score down a touch, as the other elements are just lovely. 2016-2035. **92.**

**1998 Cabernet Sauvignon “Martha’s Vineyard”- Heitz Wine Cellars (Napa)**

This was the first time that I had the pleasure to taste the 1998 vintage of Martha’s Vineyard and the wine is excellent. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a ripe and classic constellation of sappy cherries, blood orange, a touch of red currant, eucalyptus, a fine base of soil, cedar and fine spicy complexity in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now nicely open for business as it closes in on its twentieth birthday, with a superb core, impeccable balance and a very long, complex and moderately tannic finish. A classic in the making. 2020-2060+. **94+.**

**1991 Dominus (Napa Valley)**

It had been more than six years since I last had the pleasure to drink a bottle of the 1991 Dominus, but this bottle popped up at a mixed lineup of wines that included such items as 1978 Trappet Chambertin and 1975 Latour à Pomerol and the wine held its own very well indeed. The bouquet is deep, refined and very polished, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, cassis, salty soil tones, cigar wrapper and new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly complex, with a ripe core of fruit, melting tannin and fine length and grip on the wide open and *à point* finish. This is a very high quality vintage of Dominus. 2016-2040. **94.**

**1981 Cabernet Sauvignon “Jimsamore- Monte Bello” Ridge Vineyards**

This interesting vineyard blend cabernet from Ridge Vineyards was comprised of seventy-eight percent Jimsamore Ranch fruit and twenty-two percent from the Monte Bello Vineyard, which lies higher up on the same peak. The wine is deep and complex, though fairly marked by brett, as it offers up an aromatic constellation of cassis, cigar ash, lovely soil tones, leather and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core, melting tannins and very good length and grip on the focused finish. I am usually pretty tolerant of a bit of brett, but this wine is a bit above my threshold of complete enjoyment and the brettanomyces keeps the score down a bit for me. Without the brett, this would be four points higher. 2016-2030. **88.**

**1980 Cabernet Sauvignon “Gamble Ranch”- Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard (magnum)**

This bottling was actually made from purchased grapes from Gamble Ranch in Napa, so this is not a Santa Cruz Mountain cabernet, despite the winery’s name on the masthead. That said, it is a lovely wine and really quite surprising in its low 12.1 percent alcohol. I am sure in its

youth, this was plenty herbal, but today, it is beautifully savory in its blend of cassis, cigar ash, a nice base of soil, tobacco leaf, gentle weediness and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a solid core, lovely complexity and very good length and grip on the still slightly weedy finish. For those who do not like any touch of pyrazines in their cabernet, this is would not be enjoyable, but I quite liked the wine. 2016-2030. **88.**

#### **1979 Cabernet Sauvignon “Bates Ranch”- Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard**

In contrast to the above wine, the 1979 Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard cabernet actually hails from the region, as the grapes for this bottling were purchased from Bates Ranch in Gilroy. The wine has aged beautifully and is now drinking at its peak, offering up a complex nose of black cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of cigar ash. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and soil-driven in personality, with good, but not great depth at the core, resolved tannins and impressive length and grip on the quite refined finish. This is not quite as complex as the Martin Ray '79 served alongside of it, but this is a very good bottle that has aged very successfully. 2016-2025. **90.**

#### **1979 Martin Ray Cabernet Sauvignon (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

This wine was made by Martin Ray's son, Peter Martin Ray, as his father had passed away in 1970. According to Jeffrey Patterson of Mount Eden Vineyards (who sat next to me at the tasting where this wine was shared), the source for the grapes for this bottling would have been the Mike Smith Vineyard. The wine came in at twelve percent alcohol in '79, but offers up lovely breed on both the nose and palate, wafting from the glass in fully resolved and stylish bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, a touch of dried eucalyptus, lovely soil tones and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, complex and nicely balanced, with a good, respectable core, melted tannins and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This has evolved into a lovely middleweight and is now at its apogee. 2016-2030+. **92.**

#### **1977 Cuvaion Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)**

This was one of Philip Togni's last vintages at Cuvaion and he made a really lovely wine in this drought year. The wine came in at an even thirteen percent octane and today offers up a pure and complex bouquet of cassis, sweet cigar wrapper, just a touch of mint, dark soil tones, petroleum jelly, new leather and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and absolutely *à point*, with a lovely core of fruit, just a touch of backend tannin and fine length and grip on the complex and very well-balanced finish. Fine juice. 2016-2035+. **92.**



## THE 1990 PRODUTTORI DEL BARBARESCO CRUS



Recently I was invited to share in a tasting of the entire lineup of Cru bottlings from the Produttori del Barbaresco's 1990 vintage. While I have drunk more than my fair share of the beautiful wines from the Produttori, this was an opportunity I had never previously had, to taste across the entire range of single vineyard bottlings from the same vintage, side by side. Needless to say, I was absolutely delighted to join this seasoned group of tasters for the evening. The tasting was organized by Mannie Berk of The Rare Wine Company for his private tasting group, and I have had the pleasure to taste with this excellent collective of tasters in the past and have always enjoyed their comments and impressions of whatever wines we are tasting. This is particularly true when we are tasting Piedmontese wines together, for though this group probably has as deep a collective cellar as any in the country, these gentlemen are primarily Bordeaux and Burgundy collectors, and so when we sample wines from Piemonte together, their perspectives are very fresh and insightful. Sadly, our ambition of tasting all nine of the 1990 Crus was undone by the unhappy cork gods, who handed us off bottles of both the Pora and the Montestefano (with the former rather oxidized and the latter clearly marred by TCA), but the other seven Crus were in splendid shape and really showed well at our tasting. Perhaps we will have to just try again with the entire roster of 1989 Crus? Interestingly, I should mention that 1990 was the last vintage produced at the Produttori del Barbaresco where today's Director, Aldo Vacca, was not associated with the cooperative, as this was his last vintage working with Angelo Gaja before taking over the reins of the Produttori.

In any event, the 1990 vintage fell right in the heart of fine era of Franco Giordano as the Cellar Master at the Produttori. *Signor* Giordano had joined the Produttori as Assistant Cellar Master in 1972 and worked alongside of the cooperative's first and legendary Cellar Master, Giorgio Boffa, from 1972 until *Signor* Boffa retired after fashioning the brilliant 1978s at the

Produttori. The transition to Franco Giordano's tenure was seamless and the wines continued to be utterly classic and exceptional in quality from his very first vintage of 1979, and these wines continue to drink beautifully to this day and are probably the best "sleeper" vintage to be found amongst the mature top years from the Produttori. However, there were a few changes in the cellar team during the early days of Franco Giordano, as the co-op hired a second person to assist with the winemaking duties here (as the Cellar Master has several other responsibilities on his plate at the Produttori beyond winemaking), and their first consulting oenologist was Roberto Macaluso, who worked with the Produttori team from 1978 through 1983. *Signor* Macaluso's duties were what we would think of as properly limited for a consulting oenologist- checking on the stability and cleanliness of the wines, conducting the lab analyses and such, while Franco Giordano was still primarily responsible for the winemaking decisions. Roberto Macaluso was followed by Giorgio Barbero, who was given an expanded degree of responsibility for the winemaking in the vintages of 1984 and 1985 and was in fact, the first full-time winemaker hired by the Produttori. Giorgio Barbero was a bit enthusiastic about some of the "modernizations" of technique that were taking root in certain cellars in Piemonte at the time, and amongst the changes that he sought to bring to the Produttori was considerably shorter maceration times for the 1984 and 1985 vintages. The directorship of the Produttori was not particularly interested in moving in this modern direction, and after the 1985 vintage, it decided to part company with *Signor* Barbero.

Starting in 1986, the cooperative decided to go in another direction, as they clearly needed someone to assist Cellar Master Franco Giordano with the winemaking on a full-time basis, but had no interest in anyone likely to have been touched by the heresy of modern wine making styles, and so hired a very young Gianni Testa, fresh out of oenology school, and sought to bring him along in the cellars under the precepts of the great, classical style of winemaking that had made the Produttori famous. It was clearly the proper strategy, as *Signor* Testa remains in his position to this day at the Produttori del Barbaresco and the wines have never again strayed into flirtation with the more modern style that was evidenced with the 1985 vintage here. In any case, by the time of the 1990 vintage, the young Gianni Testa had been working alongside of Franco Giordano for five years and the Produttori was at the top of its game, drawing collectively upon the energies and skill sets of both of these talented winemakers. Consequently, the cooperative was able to follow-up on the legendary vintage of 1989 with an extremely strong and consistent range of 1990s. At our tasting, Mannie Berk was quick to point out that the torrid 1990 vintage was more successful in Barbaresco than it was in neighboring Barolo, and the wines are generally a bit less "roasted" in personality than the Baroli from this vintage. This was amply demonstrated by our fine range of 1990s from the Produttori, with only the cru of Rio Sordo showing what I would think of as the typically roasted side of the vintage in Piemonte, and several of the other crus in this vintage were noteworthy for their purity and depth of fruit.

The 1990 vintage in Piemonte was initially very highly praised, with the hot summer considered having supplied a third straight top flight vintage in the region. The most obvious comparison is with the preceding year of 1989, which was also highly-praised out of the blocks, but was quite different stylistically from the 1990s and which has aged quite a bit more slowly in the bottle than 1990. The '89 vintage was the product of a cooler spring, with some unsettled weather during flowering cutting back yields from the outset, so that this was a small crop in both Barolo and Barbaresco. The summer of 1989 was warm and the grapes ripened beautifully,



with the evening temperatures falling as the season moved into September and early October, allowing for the wines to retain excellent acidity to go along with their ripe, but substantial chassis of tannin. In contrast, the 1990 growing season started out far more favorably than 1989, with a warm spring and a perfect flower set, so that the crop was large. The summer was hot and ripeness arrived promptly and completely, but in notable contrast to 1989, the evening temperatures on the back half of the vintage remained quite warm, so there was not the diurnal differences between day and night that often leads to the finest vintages in Piemonte. The harvest was very early by the standards of the day (though fairly typical by today's norms, in this era of global warming) and the 1990s were loaded with fruit from the outset, but not coupled to the substantial structural elements that are often part and parcel of young, great vintages, such as 1989. Consequently, the 1990s were atypically easy to appreciate when they began to be released in the mid-1990s and the vintage was initially touted as every bit as good as the 1989s and superior to the 1988s.

Over the ensuing years, the reputation of the 1990 vintage has fallen a bit from its earliest levels of praise, with the 1989s having been elevated at the same time, and today, there is really no one with experience of the two vintages that will not give the nod in ultimate quality to the 1989 vintage, which is now recognized as one of the greatest four or five vintages of the last fifty or sixty years in Piemonte. To my palate, 1989 is clearly the very greatest vintage in the region since 1964, with only the superb 1971s able to give the '89s a run for their money, and with none of the subsequent top vintages like 1996, 1999 or 2001 likely to scale the same heights as the 1989s will realize in the fullness of time. This is not to say that the '96, '99 and '01 are not all truly outstanding vintages, but as great as they will be when they have had sufficient age to blossom, they will not reach the same majestic heights as the 1989s. In contrast, the 1990s have gotten more marked by their torrid growing conditions as the years have gone by, with the fruit tones losing some of their bountiful depth that was so much in evidence when the wines still had ample puppy fat, and also starting to get more overtly "roasted" in character with the passage of time. The tannins have faded fairly briskly by the standards of the region, though they were never all that sturdy to begin with, and the lower acids of 1990 have become far more noticeable as the years have gone by and I often miss a bit of acidity in the wines of this vintage today. To my palate, 1990 is still a pretty good vintage, but in the decade of the 1980s, I rank not only 1989, but 1982, 1985 and 1988 higher than 1990.

That said, the range of 1990 Crus from the Produttori del Barbaresco showed very well at our tasting in late September of this year, with several of the top bottlings amongst the very finest 1990 wines that I have tasted from Piemonte in the last several years. Only a couple of the wines seemed to be clearly marked by the roasted character of the '90 vintage (Rio Sordo and Ovello) and the majority of the crus seemed to have admirable vibrancy and depth still to their fruit components, very good soil signatures and the resolving tannic structures to continue to cruise along nicely for many, many years to come. As will come as no surprise to fans of the Produttori, the pick of the litter were the 1990s from the Asili and Rabajà vineyards, with honorable mention going to the truly beautiful 1990 Montefico. But, these are all very enjoyable wines to drink from the 1990 vintage, with the very top tier of Produttori crus probably capable of at least twenty to twenty-five more years of positive evolution in bottle. Whether the finest of these 1990s crus will start to show a bit more of the vintage's character as they evolve with further bottle age remains to be seen, but there is an awful lot to like from the Produttori del

Barbaresco in 1990 and this is a highly successful and classy range of wines. I should also mention that the 1990 vintage was chosen by the directorship of the Produttori as the proper year to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of their precursor cooperative in the village, the Cantine Sociali di Barbaresco, which was the first winery to use the name Barbaresco for its wines and was established in 1894. To mark this centennial, the Produttori produced a special magnum bottling called “Centenario” Riserva from the 1990 vintage to mark the one hundredth anniversary in 1994. The Centenario was comprised of a blend from four of the crus, Asili, Montestefano, Ovello and Pora and bottled only in magnums. It was not part of our most recent tasting, but has always shown nicely on the times that I have drunk it in the past, and I have included my most recent note from a few years ago as part of this report, just for the sake of completeness.

#### **1990 Barbaresco “Moccagatta” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

Moccagatta was one of the first five Crus to be bottled by the Produttori in the 1967 vintage, and it has been a mainstay in their lineup since that first vintage. The 1990 is a very strong example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, anise, gamebird, forest floor and a touch of red curry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite vibrant for a 1990, with a fine core of fruit, still a bit of chewy backend tannin and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is a lovely 1990. 2016-2040. **92.**

#### **1990 Barbaresco “Rio Sordo” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1990 Rio Sordo from the Produttori del Barbaresco is a very nice wine that is now at its apogee, but this wine does show a bit of the “roasted” character of the vintage in general and is one of the weaker crus in the lineup. The nose today is complex, quite autumnal in profile and expressive, offering up scents of dried cherries, *sous bois*, charred wood, game, red curry and a bit of camphor in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and now quite tertiary, with good, but not great depth, melted tannins and a long, focused and completely mature finish. This was the only 1990 cru that tended to fade a bit with extended time in the glass, whereas the entirety of the remaining lineup continued to blossom with air. Consequently, I would be inclined to drink up the 1990 Rio Sordo over the next decade. 2016-2025. **88.**

#### **1990 Barbaresco “Ovello” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The Produttori’s 1990 Ovello is like a cross between the Moccagatta and the Rio Sordo, as like the latter, there is a bit more of a roasted character to the fruit here, but like the former, it is plush, pure and still nicely youthful in personality and has a long future ahead of it. The bouquet offers up scents of baked black fruit, bonfire, game, coffee, a touch of camphor and a superb base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and gently touched by the style of the vintage, with modest tannins, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and gently autumnal finish. This is a lovely wine that may not last quite as long as the Moccagatta, but will deliver plenty of pleasure for many years to come. 2016-2030+. **90.**

#### **1990 Barbaresco “Pajè” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1990 Barbaresco “Pajè” from the Produttori was probably the least evolved of our first flight of crus at our tasting, with a similar level of freshness as what is found in the Moccagatta today. The bouquet is a touch more primary in its personality, offering up scents of black cherries, curry, roasted game, camphor, a lovely base of dark soil tones and a bit of road tar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still a bit chewy on

the backend, with blossoming autumnal soil elements in evidence on the backend, a good core of fruit and a long, well-balanced and quite classic finish. Good juice. 2018-2035+. **90+**.

**1990 Barbaresco “Pora” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The Pora 1990 was not on form, showing overt signs of oxidation and sautéed onions on both the nose and palate. There was good stuffing at the core and I would love to see a pristine bottle of this wine sometime.



**1990 Barbaresco “Montestefano” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

This particular bottle of the 1990 Montestefano from the Produttori was corked, which was quite unfortunate, as underneath the TCA taint was a wine of admirable purity, depth and complexity. This was the first wine in our second flight of crus and it seemed pretty clear that if the bottle had not been corked, it would have been superior to any of the first five crus we tasted in the first flight.

**1990 Barbaresco “Montefico” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

I discovered at this tasting that I appear to be the only professional journalist who ranks the Montefico bottling from the Produttori in their top tier of Cru bottlings, as I have always liked this third best, behind the brilliant Asili and Rabajà bottlings here. Happily, the 1990 Montefico was showing superbly well at our tasting and seemed to add credence to my championing of this superb *terroir*. The bouquet is deep, pure and nicely transparent in profile, offering up a complex blend of sweet dark berries, licorice, gamebird, a superb base of soil, a touch of tariness, gentle Italian herbs, autumn leaves and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate

the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and impressively soil-driven, with excellent mid-palate depth, modest tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, classy and very detailed finish. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2040. **93.**

**1990 Barbaresco “Asili” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

It is interesting that this was the first time I had ever tasted the 1990 Asili, and the couple of times I had tasted the 1990 Rabajà, I had tried it alongside other vintages of this superb cru. Consequently, I had never tasted either wine amongst its vintage peers, and I wonder if my scores would be different if these were paired up with their counterparts from 1988 or 1989 for instance. In any case, the 1990 Asili showed beautifully at our horizontal tasting, offering up a pure, stunning and still fairly youthful bouquet of cherries, grilled *pigeon*, red curry, a touch of anise, stunning soil tones, nutskin and a lovely topnote of spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very soil-driven in personality, with a nice touch of sappiness to the red fruit at the core, fine-grained tannins and superb length and grip on the focused and complex finish. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2040+. **94+**

**1990 Barbaresco “Rabajà” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco**

The 1990 Rabajà from the Produttori showed brilliantly at our tasting, and I wonder if I underrated this wine on the couple of previous occasions that I tasted it, or was a bit more smitten with its exemplary quality at this horizontal tasting, as there was no flanking bottle of the 1989 with which to draw comparisons? Whichever might be the truth, this wine was absolutely singing at this tasting, soaring from the glass in a pure and stunning constellation of black cherries, black plums, licorice, gamebirds, just a touch of road tar, forest floor and a topnote of almond. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with modest tannins, good acids, fine focus and grip and a very long, vibrant and beautifully balanced finish. Another very fine bottle of 1990! 2016-2040+. **94+**

**1990 Barbaresco “Centenario” Riserva- Produttori del Barbaresco (magnum)**

This is a special bottling that was released in 1994 only in magnums to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the first cooperative in Barbaresco, the Cantine Sociali di Barbaresco, which was the first winery to use the name Barbaresco for its wines when it opened its doors in 1894. In a perfect world the 1994 vintage would have been excellent and allowed the Produttori to mark the centennial of its spiritual predecessor with wines from the one hundred year mark, but Mother Nature did not cooperate, and the winery decided instead to make a special bottling of a blend of old vines from the vineyards of Ovello, Pora, Montestefano and Asili. The wine is still quite young on both the nose and palate (particularly from magnum), as it offers up a complex, black fruity nose of dark berries, road tar, herb tones, scorched earth, woodsmoke, a touch of nutskin and spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and tarry, with a rock solid core of fruit, firm tannins and good length and grip on the finish. This is a very good bottle of Barbaresco, but I have a slight preference for the singular signatures of soil of the individual crus over this fine blended bottling. 2012-2040. **90.**

## A FEW 2014 RED BURGUNDIES IN BOTTLE



Though I spend five weeks each year in Burgundy, I never seem to have enough time here to visit everyone that I would like to taste with *sur place*, as the region gets more popular with visitors each and every year and *vignerons* are often as busy showing their wines in their cellars as they are out in the vines pruning during the winter months. This is especially true during my November visits each year, and it is almost as busy on the spring return trip if the Les Grands Jours tastings (which are held every other year) are on the calendar. Consequently, I find it very hard to add new domaines to visit to my yearly itineraries, and I often cannot find a date that works with my schedule and the domaine's on some trips, so that sometimes folks that I taste with every year fall out of the rotation for a vintage, due to today's heavily travelled Burgundy tasting routes. Such was the case with the 2014 vintage from Domaine Rossignol-Trapet, whose wines I consistently enjoy, as I was never able to find a time during my two trips this past year that fit in with the Rossignols' own schedule, and I had not yet had an opportunity to taste through their 2014s. Into this breach steps Michael Feuerstein of Pas Mal Selections, who represents the Rossignol-Trapet wines here in New York, as well as a plethora of other outstanding Burgundy producers and Grower Champagnes. While busily working through many of his Grower Champagne producers at a tasting in early September, Michael asked me if I had tried the 2014 Rossignol-Trapet wines, as he had brought a range of their wines to the tasting as

well. When I mentioned that I would probably not have enough time to even get through all of his fine Champagne producers at the tasting before closing time, he kindly offered to let me take a set of the 2014 Rossignol-Trapet wines with me at the end of the tasting, if any unopened bottles remained. Needless to say, I was more than interested! At the close of the tasting, five of the wines still had unopened bottles, so due to Michael's extraordinary generosity, I am able to provide notes on these five of the domaine's top wines from 2014 in this short feature.

To flesh out this brief report are two more domaines who I have never had the pleasure to visit while on the road in the Côte d'Or, Domaine Anne et Hervé Sigaut in Chambolle-Musigny and Domaine Joblot in Givry. The Sigaut family's New York importer, Doug Polaner, has kindly sent me their full range of wines in both 2013 and 2014, once they have landed here in New York., and I was very happy to have these bottles waiting to be tasted when I brought home the 2014s from Rossignol-Trapet, as this gave me another domaine's wines from this vintage to include in this report. The Sigaut 2014s were in fact so lovely that I have made room on this coming trip to the region to visit *sur place* here and taste their 2015s. The 2014s are quintessential Chambolles that just revel in the purity and silky depth of fruit of the vintage and have to be some of the very best values to be found from Burgundy in this outstanding vintage. The two 2014 wines I tasted from Domaine Joblot were also very well-made and again offer up excellent value. I have followed this domaine's wines on again and off again since the late 1980s and have always found them to age very nicely. Their 2014s seem to me to be a bit more polished and classy than the very good wines they were making back in the late '80s and early '90s, when I tasted them with more frequency and are highly recommended in 2014.

I should take a moment to circle back around to the overall quality of the red wines of the 2014 Burgundy vintage, as I have read elsewhere that this is a very nice, pleasant and easy-drinking vintage along the lines of 2007 or 2000 and will offer up plenty of short-term pleasure while Burgundy lovers wait for the more serious vintages from the last decade to mature in the cellar. While at a certain level this is true, it does a strong disservice to the actual quality of the 2014 reds, which are clearly a step or two above the quality of both the 2000s and 2007s (both of which vintages I like very much and are strongly represented in my cellar), as there is more depth, structure and potential to be found in the 2014s than in either of these previous vintages. As I wrote about back in Issues 60 and 62, the 2014 vintage reminds me very strongly of the 1985s when they were young and 2014 is destined to be looked at a couple of decades down the road as one of the very finest red Burgundy vintages in this great string of vintages in the Côte d'Or. In the fullness of time, the vintage will tower over both 2007 and 2000. I suppose it is one of the benefits of getting older, as I remember very well the 1985s when they first arrived here in the US and we began to taste them in depth, as the wines were velvety, perfumed and beautifully reflective of their underlying *terroir*, as is the case with the 2014s. The key difference between the two vintages is that the 1985s arrived after a dearth of top flight vintages in previous years, as only the 1978s were truly exceptional in the decade leading up to the 1985s, whereas the 2014 reds arrive in the middle of one of the greatest "hot streaks" in the history of red Burgundy. So, the 1985s were greeted by Burgundy lovers with great fanfare, whereas the 2014s seem to be quite underestimated out of the blocks. But, the 2014 red Burgundy vintage is marked for greatness with time in the cellar, as it possesses the depth and seamless balance that will allow this vintage to blossom brilliantly with the passage of time.

### ***Domaine Rossignol-Trapet (Gevrey-Chambertin)***

#### **2014 Gevrey-Chambertin “Petite Chapelle”- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet**

The 2014 Petite Chapelle from the Rossignol brothers is a beautiful, young example of the vintage, delivering great precision on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is still on the young side, but offers up great promise in its constellation of cherries, red plums, a touch of youthful stems, cocoa powder, hints of grilled meats, fresh thyme, lovely soil tones and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, transparent and intensely flavored, with a lovely core of red fruit, fine focus and grip and a very long, suavely tannic and complex finish. Structurally, this is already not too hard to drink, but it is still a puppy and I would not touch a bottle until at least another five or six years has gone by, so that the wine can really blossom and start to hit on all cylinders. 2021-2060. **92+**.

#### **2014 Gevrey-Chambertin “Clos Prieur”- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet**

The 2014 Clos Prieur from Domaine Rossignol-Trapet is beautifully red fruity this year (this wine is often quite black fruity in personality), sharing the superb soil transparency one finds also in the Petite Chapelle. The bouquet is pure and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, red plums, grilled meats, black minerality, a touch of espresso, just a touch of mustard seed and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and fairly youthful in profile, with a lovely core, superb minerality, moderate tannins, tangy acids and truly excellent length and grip on the focused and still quite primary finish. I love the elegance and transparency of this vintage of Clos Prieur *chez* Rossignol, and given sufficient bottle age, this is going to be a stunning, middleweight premier cru Gevrey! 2022-2055. **92+**.

#### **2014 Latricières-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet**

Whenever I visit the Rossignol brothers in Gevrey, they always serve their Latricières after their Chapelle-Chambertin, but given that I have a very, very slight preference for the *terroir* of Chapelle, I thought I would reverse the two for this report. The 2014 Latricières from the domaine is a stunning wine in the making, but this is still very young and in need of a good decade to start to really stir. The youthful bouquet is pure, complex and vibrant, offering up scents of cherries, strawberries, cocoa powder, a touch of gamebird, fresh herb tones, a beautiful base of soil and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is very pure, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a fine core of red fruit, lovely transparency, ripe, fine-grained tannins, tangy acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and still quite youthful finish. This is not a big wine, but it has depth and intensity of flavor and will be excellent once it blossoms. 2025-2075. **93+**.

#### **2014 Chapelle-Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet**

The 2014 Chapelle from Domaine Rossignol-Trapet is sappier than the Latricières, but not a big step up in ultimate quality. The youthful bouquet is pure and complex, wafting from the glass in a constellation of cherries, red plums, raw cocoa, a superbly complex signature of soil, gamebirds, a touch of nutskin, mustard seed and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, nascently complex and very refined, with a superb core of red fruit, lovely transparency, fine-grained tannins and a very long, tangy and utterly poised finish. This is going to be a superb and utterly classic example of Chapelle-Chambertin, but it needs time! 2025-2075. **94+**.

#### **2014 Chambertin- Domaine Rossignol-Trapet**

The 2014 vintage of Domaine Rossignol-Trapet’s Chambertin is a truly great wine in the making. The bouquet is deep, pure and nascently complex, offering up a refined blend of



cherries, red plums, a touch of grilled meats, fresh thyme, a complex base of soil, nutskin, a touch of mustard seed, coffee and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with superb soil signature, a great core of red fruit, fine-grained tannins, tangy acids and laser-like focus on the very long, youthful and oh, so promising finish. This is a long way from being ready to drink, but it will be a tremendous wine when it is fully mature and will prove to be very long-lived. 2027-2085+. **95+**.

***Domaine Anne et Hervé Sigaut***

**2014 Chambolle-Musigny- Domaine Anne et Hervé Sigaut**

The 2014 Chambolle-Musigny AC from Domaine Anne et Hervé Sigaut is a very pretty middleweight that could use a few years in the cellar to start to blossom. The bouquet offers up classic Chambolle notes of cherries, red plum, a touch of nutskin, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, vanillin oak and a fine base of chalky soil. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and still fairly tight and bouncy, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, tangy finish. This is a bit bound up behind its girdle of acidity today and really should be given at least four five years in the cellar, but if you wish to drink it earlier, make sure to give it an hour in decanter before serving. 2020-2045+. **88+**.

**2014 Chambolle-Musigny “Derrière le Four”- Domaine Anne et Hervé Sigaut**

The 2014 Derrière le Four from the Sigaut family is more black fruity in personality than the Chambolle AC and a bit more serious as well. The bouquet is youthful, but very promising, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, a touch of dark berry, a beautiful base of darker soil tones, cocoa, gamebird, woodsmoke and mustard seed. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and still fairly primary in personality, with a lovely, sappy core of black fruit, fine soil signature, tangy acids and lovely balance and grip on the long and suavely tannic finish. This is really, really good for its level! 2021-2050. **91**.

**2014 Chambolle-Musigny “les Bussières” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Anne et Hervé Sigaut**

The 2014 Chambolle-Musigny “les Bussières” Vieilles Vignes from Domaine Sigaut is produced from a parcel of fifty-plus year-old vines and is raised in twenty percent new wood. The wine is still quite young on both the nose and palate, with its touch of new oak still working its way down for full integration. The bouquet offers up a reticent, but promising blend of plums, black cherries, dark soil tones, mustard seed and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with a good core, fine soil signature and good length and grip on the modestly tannic and primary finish. This will be a lovely village wine with a bit more bottle age, but it does need some time in the cellar to allow the layers here to start to snap into place. Good juice. 2020-2045+. **89+**.

**2014 Chambolle-Musigny “les Chatelots”- Domaine Anne et Hervé Sigaut**

Domaine Anne et Hervé Sigaut’s 2014 Chatelots is a truly outstanding young bottle of Chambolle, jumping from the glass in a vibrant aromatic constellation of cherries, blood orange, chalky soil tones, *pigeon*, gentle smokiness, roses, mustard seed and a touch of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and light on its feet, with lovely intensity of flavor, tangy acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, modestly tannic and vibrant finish. I love the backend energy on this wine, which needs some time in the cellar to develop its secondary layers of complexity, but which is going to be very hard to keep one’s hands off of in its youth, as it is already quite delicious. Very 1985-like. 2021-2055. **91+**.

### **2014 Chambolle-Musigny “les Fuées”- Domaine Anne et Hervé Sigaut**

Along with les Cras, les Fuées is the finest premier cru *terroir* in Chambolle-Musigny after les Amoureuses, and the Sigaut family produces a lovely example of this superb vineyard. Their 2014 les Fuées is deep, pure and beautifully transparent on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of cherries, red plums, raw cocoa, violets, a complex base of soil tones, gamebird and spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with excellent focus and grip, nascent complexity, lovely intensity of flavor and outstanding length and grip on the tangy and beautifully balanced finish. This is not the deepest or longest premier cru in the Sigaut stable in 2014, but it is the most refined, and this thoroughbred will prove to be their finest example of vintage in the fullness of time. 2024-2065. **93.**

### **2014 Chambolle-Musigny “les Noirots”- Domaine Anne et Hervé Sigaut**

The les Noirots bottling from Domaine Sigaut receives a short cold soak prior to fermentation and is raised in thirty percent new wood. A significant percentage of the vines here were planted in the 1960s. The 2014 version is an excellent Chambolle premier cru, offering up a deep and stylish bouquet of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, a touch of nutskin, gamebird, a fine base of soil, violets and a discreet framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and sappy at the core, with great focus and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and impeccably balanced finish. This will be outstanding with a bit of bottle age and is one of the great sleepers of the 2014 vintage. 2022-2060. **92+.**

### **2014 Chambolle-Musigny “les Sentiers” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Anne et Hervé Sigaut**

The vineyard of les Sentiers, which I know quite well from my formative years drinking Jacky Truchot’s wines, is one of the most Morey-like premier crus in Chambolle, but none the less worthy for accurately reflecting its position on the border between the two communes. Domaine Sigaut has old vines in this premier cru, having been planted in 1947. The 2014 Sigaut Sentiers is a classic expression of this *terroir*, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, a touch of beetroot, dark soil tones, a touch of venison, fresh herb tones and a fair bit of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a sappy core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe tannins and lovely length and grip on the poised and still quite primary finish. Structurally, this wine is quite approachable, but in terms of development, it is still a puppy and needs some extended cellaring to really blossom. 2021-2055. **92.**

### ***Domaine Joblot (Givry)***

#### **2014 Givry “Servoisine”- Domaine Joblot**

The 2014 Givry “Servoisine” from Domaine Joblot is a very nice example of its vintage, with a bit more new oak than I personally would have given the wine, but with enough stuffing to likely integrate the wood fully with a bit of bottle age. The bouquet is deep and nascently complex, offering up scents of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, chalky soil tones, a touch of mustard seed and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely suave on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, bright acids and good length and grip on the slightly dry-edged finish. I do not know how much new oak this wine received, but it seems like the perfect cuvée to be raised in the future in “one wine” casks, as the new oak here gets in the way of what is a pretty serious wine underneath the veneer. I would give this a year or two in the cellar to more fully integrate its oak, after which it should drink very nicely for at least a dozen years. 2018-2030+. **89.**

### **2014 Givry “Clos du Cellier aux Moines”- Domaine Joblot**

The Clos du Cellier aux Moines bottling from Domaine Joblot is the one I used to drink most often back in the day, and the 2014 version is every bit as good as the vintages of this I drank back in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s. Like the Servoisine, this wine has been given a fairly significant coating of new oak and one has to work around that (or really like all that oak spice), but there is good wine underneath! The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of spicy new oak, black cherries, a touch of dark berry, dark soil tones, fresh herbs and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and chewy, with a bit more reticent personality than the Servoisine out of the blocks, but equally good depth at the core, with good focus and grip, a bit of backend tannin and very good length on the finish. This will probably need a year or two longer in the cellar to blossom than the Servoisine, but it should ultimately be pretty close in quality once it has blossomed. 2021-2031+. **88+**.