

# VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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## THE SEARCH FOR VALUE IN RED BURGUNDY HOW TO DECODE THE REGION IN 2021



*Domaine Chandon de Briailles in Savigny, as seen looking back at the house from their beautiful gardens.*

I recently saw a list of “Burgundy values” posted on Twitter by a young Master of Wine (whose name now escapes me), which got me to thinking about how I might approach this same topic in the dramatically changed realities of the Burgundy market over the last decade or so. Naturally, if I had agreed with the recommendations of this young MW, I probably would not have given the issue another thought, but his or her judgments were wide enough of the mark in my opinion that I felt this might be a good topic for broader discussion. It is not that I blame the young MW for his or her lack of insight or condemn them for their worthy aspirations, as the cold reality of Burgundy pricing is an impediment to exploring the region’s wines for a significant percentage of the world’s wine-drinking population and now makes proper experience with the region’s finest wines harder and harder to accrue. For all but a select few, the most hallowed of appellations and most famous producers in these vineyards are now the stuff of legend, rather than actually wines in their cellars or gracing their dinner tables. And, as in all human endeavors, as true knowledge fails in later days, myths and rumor will rise up to take their place. So, before darkness falls completely, here is my attempt to provide a bit of a road map to drinking great red Burgundy for those who do not have the unlimited discretionary income to simply drink and cellar the “best of the best” in Burgundy without any consideration

of the price of admission. For contrary to popular wisdom, there remains a vast pool of lesser-known Burgundy gems that still fit comfortably (or at least relatively comfortably) into a wider range of wine budgets than one might suppose from checking the current price tag on the most recent vintages of La Tâche or La Romanée.

Before diving into suggestions for relative values still to be had in the contemporary world of Burgundy buying, let me take you back to a day when even intrepid younger wine drinkers who did not have very large budgets could explore the region. When I was first starting out in the wide trade and knew virtually nothing about the deep historical waters of Burgundy wines and the people and treasured vineyards behind them, the general rule of thumb in the business for those that were as clueless about the region's wines as I was at that time was that "Burgundy was a minefield" and so "intricately complicated as to be virtually incomprehensible" to anyone who was not Burgundian by birth. Of course, this was patently not the case and simply the mantra of those who chose not to put a little intellectual curiosity into their chosen profession and it was really little more than a variation of the old children's fable about the fox and the grapes that were out of reach, and thus had to be sour by definition. This was back in the early 1980s. However, my arrival on the staff of one merchant who was starting to specialize in Burgundy, Big Y Wines in Northampton, Massachusetts, afforded me the opportunity to taste the fruits of the labor of one wine buyer who was very well-versed in the region and was at that time one of the most well-known Burgundy merchants on the east coast of the US. When I was hired at Big Y, I was so "green" that I could not even pronounce Echézeaux properly and had certainly never tasted an example from that vineyard, but I was young and curious and was fortunate to be the most junior member on a staff that knew the wines of Burgundy very well. Like many young wine drinkers, the only Burgundies I had tasted up until that point were simple Bourgogne bottlings and I had found them relatively thin and charmless and wondered what all the fuss was about in the first place. I was soon to learn differently.

I still remember my first taste of real red Burgundy where I started to realize that these were very deep waters and I had not yet even dipped a toe in them to check the temperature, as the rather ramshackle lot of simple Bourgognes I had tasted up to that point had really been only those bottled by third tier producers and rather commercially-oriented *négociants*, so I really had no idea what a proper Burgundy tasted like. As the most junior member on the staff at Big Y, my initial responsibilities were generally just putting away newly-arrived cases and restocking the depleted acres of wine racks on the sales floor. Occasionally, a friend whom I might have gone to college with would stop by and ask me for a recommendation on a wine, but we had plenty of far more-seasoned staff members to whom our clientele looked to for wine guidance. One day, I walked in for my afternoon and evening shift and found a couple of pallets of newly-arrived Chablis to put away in storage, so my first several hours of work that day were tucking away the small mountain of 1984s from René and Vincent Dauvissat that had just been delivered. I did not know the wines of the Dauvissat family at all at that time, but did know that the 1984 vintage was considered one of the worst in recent times in Burgundy and wondered why our wine buyer had bought a hundred cases of these wines. I asked one of the senior sales staff about this when we had a quiet moment to chat, and he explained that "Domaine Dauvissat is one of the very best producers in Chablis" and that our wine buyer had "tasted their 1984s and really liked them", adding, "when it comes to Burgundy, you do not buy labels or vintages, you buy producers." So, I had spent the last couple of hours finding room for all of those 1984 Dauvissat Chablis.

When I went back to the office to get my next assignment for stocking, the same staff member handed me a glass of red wine and said, “here, taste this and you will get some idea about what you were putting away.” It was obviously not an example of 1984 Dauvissat Chablis (though I would drink a ton of those 1984s over the coming months, as they were indeed superb for the vintage and the les Preuses and les Clos cost all of \$16.99 a bottle for the 1984s!), but the wine in my glass was excellent. It turned out to be a 1979 Clos de la Roche from Domaine Georges Lignier. The senior staff member explained to me that 1979 was not a great year for red Burgundy, just a pretty good one, but the Lignier family had been making good wines for the last decade or more and their 1979s were very much worth their price and had the added benefit of drinking well from a young age, so they were a good option for those wanting to buy a bottle of Burgundy off of our shelves and drink it the same evening (the price for it was \$35 per bottle). And he repeated, forget about vintage charts when it comes to Burgundy and just learn who is making the good wines. If the producer is making good wines then chances are that everything that they make is good, up and down their hierarchy of vineyards, and that it would take an act of God to prevent them from making at least good wines, even in difficult growing seasons. Keep in mind that the rain leading into harvest in 1984 was indeed of biblical proportions in Burgundy, and yet I had just put away at least a hundred cases of the Dauvissat family’s wines from that vintage (maybe it did not rain as heavily in Chablis as it did in the Côte d’Or in 1984, but I cannot remember now.) In any case, I took away from that evening that I needed to learn more about who were the best producers in Burgundy, as I certainly wanted to drink more wines like that 1979 Clos de la Roche!

Fast forward less than a year and I had secured my first job as a wine buyer for another large retail store, and with impeccable timing it might seem, as the pre-release offers of the 1985 vintage were just starting to come out from importers in the market. The problem was that the most I had learned about Burgundy was that I really did not know all that much about the region, despite having soaked up as much knowledge as I could during my stay on the staff at Big Y Wines. It was just that the deep waters of Burgundy still seemed too vast, with my appetite for reading about the region unlikely to catch up with all of the variations in play here in time for me to buy the 1985s in a logical manner. Though I had drunk an awful lot of 1984 les Preuses and les Clos from the Dauvissats in the last several months, I still was not really equipped to buy the vintage for my new bosses. But, I at least had the advantage of being the wine buyer for a high volume store, so we might be granted access to some of the more rare wines available in our market- if I knew enough to ask my salesperson about the availability of a given domaine’s wines in the 1985 vintage. Of course, no one on the supply side was particularly inclined to volunteer information, so I had to rely on what I had learned so far and what I could pick up from reading carefully Clive Coates’ early notes on the ’85 vintage. Looking back on it today, I did not do all that badly in fielding a lineup of 1985s to offer our clients, as the number of merchants chasing Burgundy back in late 1986 was nowhere near as large as it is today. So, our store ended up offering 1985s from *Maisons* Joseph Drouhin, Louis Jadot, Faiveley, Bouchard Père et Fils, Louis Latour, as well as Domaines Dujac, Rousseau, Robert Chevillon, Pierre Amiot, Philippe LeClerc, Trapet, Denis Bachelet, Ponsot, René LeClerc, Truchot-Martin, Marquis d’Angerville, DRC, Rapet, Domaine Leflaive, Vincent Dauvissat, Louis Michel, Sauzet, André Forest and Bonneau du Martray. With a couple of these domaines I had to buy a handful of the unwanted 1984s to get the 1985s (Faiveley and Rousseau), but all in all, it was a pretty

successful vintage campaign. As I said, sourcing Burgundy was a lot less competitive back in those days than it is today.

In 2021, the possibility of being able to offer that same lineup of producers in a wildly popular vintage, as an inexperienced wine buyer without any long-standing institutional ties to their importers in the market is simply unthinkable. Not to mention the amount of capital that would now be required to pay for all those top wines today (we were not pre-selling Burgundies back then, so those wines all had to be paid for soon after they arrived at our store) might need an infusion from Jeff Bezos to cover the bills. I actually found out many years down the road that the owners of the store that I bought those 1985s for had actually considered firing me for spending so much money on them in the first place, but they worried about what the market might think if they sought to return them to the importers (who would have been thrilled to have them back- other than those pesky 1984s!), but in the end, they decided to ride the wave for at least a little while and see if I could sell the wines. The store had never done any serious Burgundy business prior to my arrival there, so the owners had considerable doubts if they had clients for such expensive wines at the time. In the end, we ran one newspaper advertisement with several of the wines listed (I remember that the 1985 Drouhin Beaune “Clos des Mouches” was \$25 a bottle) and we had sold out of most of our 1985s to new clients within a week or two. Ironically, the very last bottle of 1985 red Burgundy to be sold from that initial purchase was the Romanée-Conti (from the single mixed case that the distributor had been willing to sell us), as it went for the princely sum of \$250 per bottle. To dispel any notions that I really knew what I was doing back then, no, I was not the one who bought the bottle!

But, I did buy for my own cellar a reasonably wide selection of the other 1985s that we offered and through these purchases really discovered just how much I loved the wines of Burgundy. That was more than thirty years ago and I have never lost my passion for the wines from this beautiful corner of the globe, and as the decades have rolled by, I have learned that I perhaps like the people of the region even more than their beautiful wines! I had the good luck to start out my professional wine buying career with a great vintage in Burgundy, back when it was a lot harder to source wines from the top Pomerol estates in the market than it was to find many of the top Burgundies, which allowed me to begin my experience with the region with a pretty star-studded lineup of bottlings and producers from a top flight vintage that was also dazzling delicious to drink in its youth. I would like to say that I still have some of those first 1985s in my cellar today, but they were all drunk fairly young, as they would often play the role as my contributions to a tasting group I joined at the time of deep-cellarred and very experienced wine lovers. As all but one of the members of this tasting group were a couple of decades older than I was (and all doctors, for that matter), they had far deeper cellars than I did and when it was my turn to host a tasting for our group, I had to find appropriately serious wines to serve them. This is where the lion’s share of my first cache of 1985s were served, but I have no regrets, as these gentlemen were all extremely generous in their own right with both their cellars and their considerable depth of wine knowledge, and I seriously doubt my career would have taken the path it did if I had not been lucky enough to be invited to taste with this esteemed group of wine lovers. And, all things considered, great Burgundy is meant for sharing, so those 1985s were most emphatically not wasted.



Back to the present day. It would simply not be possible now to replicate my early experiences with the wines of Burgundy (at least without an extremely elastic budget), but this does not mean that one cannot drink nearly as well and cellar a formidable collection of wines that will be truly superb at maturity, without having to harness the financial muscle that comes with having been born into the top of the food chain in the Saudi royal family. As was the case when I was coming up in the wine trade, one still has to remember that first piece of sage advice from that senior staff member at Big Y Wines (on the day I put all those 1984 Dauvissats away) and remember to buy producers in Burgundy, not vintages or appellations. Which leads me back to our well-meaning and obviously inexperienced MW and their list of “Burgundy values”. Their strategy has been to buy wines from very good, but not most famous producers of any of the most illustrious villages in the Côte d’Or. One could certainly get some very good wines following their proposed purchasing strategies, but in my opinion, one could do far better (and spend less money, as several of their suggestions were hardly “inexpensive” producers, as seemingly, they just could not come up with any names that they knew in certain villages that were not rather expensive) by focusing more on the less famous communes of Burgundy and buying the very best producers there. I admit that there is a certain desire in the heart of almost every wine drinker to sit at the table and look into the mystical depths of one of the fanciest labels of Burgundy, while savoring the magic of the same wine in one’s glass, but there is plenty of room to do so with a few special bottles over the years and still build a superb foundation of a Burgundy cellar and not go bankrupt at the same time.

Let us start out with red Burgundy, as this is seemingly the more challenging of the two colors to still buy with some semblance of a budget. I will tackle the same topic with white Burgundy in a future issue of the newsletter, as to try and cover both colors here would make this article rather unwieldy in length. While I love bottles of Musigny, Chambertin, Bonnes-Mares or La Tâche every bit as much or more than the next wine enthusiast, I also understand that a great many (especially younger) wine collectors are not going to be in a position to buy these wines for their own collections, at least not in the meaningful quantities necessary to build a foundation for a proper Burgundy cellar for the long haul. But, there remains a myriad of other options available to buy and collect superb examples of red Burgundy for longer-term cellaring that will not crush the budget with the purchase of only a few bottles, and which will allow one to drink a great lineup of mature red wines in the decades to come. As I mentioned above, one very rewarding approach is to cellar wines from the very best producers in some of the less famous villages of the Côte d'Or. To cite just one example at the present time, Gilles Lafouge in the village of Auxey-Duresses is making some of the most beautiful wines to be found anywhere in the region today, with his reds built to age long and gracefully and destined to be truly superb wines when they have reached full maturity. Monsieur Lafouge also makes exceptional white wines as well, which will feature prominently in our discussion down the road on where the good white Burgundy values remain today.

So, first one has to identify the less famous or less popular red wine-producing villages in the Côte d'Or if one is looking for the best values for building a cellar. The obvious choices here are Marsannay, Nuits St. Georges, Pernand-Vergelesses, Savigny-lès-Beaune, Beaune, Pommard, Volnay, Monthélie, Auxey-Duresses, Chassagne-Montrachet *rouges*, Maranges and Mercurey. Not all of these villages make comparably long-lived red wines (top examples of Marsannay or Monthélie are not going to possess the same staying power as the best examples from Savigny, Pernand, Nuits St. Georges or Pommard), but all of these can offer outstanding, complex and refined drinking when the wines are fully mature. I am not equally familiar with all of the top producers in each of these communes, as I can only cover so much ground on each trip here, despite spending a minimum of five or six weeks in the cellars in Burgundy every year, so the following list must be seen as a stepping stone, rather than anything comprehensive. Starting in Marsannay, my favorite estates these days are Domaine Bart, Domaine Sylvain Pataille and Domaine Joseph Roty. Jean-Louis Trapet of Gevrey-Chambertin fame also makes an excellent example of Marsannay that is a great bargain. These wines at their best deliver signature aromatics and flavors quite similar to Gevrey-Chambertin, with a lovely array of red and black fruit mixed in with notes of grilled meats, dark soil tones and plenty of smokiness. They do not scale the heights the way a Trapet or Rousseau Chambertin might, but many top Marsannays are superior to some of the third division *négociant* bottlings of Chambertin that have crossed my path over the years.

Nuits St. Georges is not the most obvious addition to my list of Burgundy values, as there are certainly some fairly expensive bottlings from Nuits in the portfolios of some of the most famous domaines in the Côte de Nuits. But, despite this fact, there are also still some excellent values from Nuits St. Georges and it remains a good source of relative values, particularly if one looks a bit beyond the most popular bottlings from the commune. Domaine Robert Chevillon et Fils is one of the stars of the village, and their top bottlings of Les St. Georges, Vaucrains and Les Cailles are certainly priced these days (at least in the US) beyond what most wine collectors

might think of as values. Yes, they remain good values compared to the pricier premier crus of comparable quality from Vosne-Romanée, Chambolle-Musigny or Gevrey-Chambertin, but they are not inexpensive wines. However, below this “big three” from the Chevillon family, one starts to see better value with their premier cru bottlings of Bousselots, Roncières, Perrières and Chaignots, and their Vieilles Vignes bottling of Nuits *villages* is also very cellar-worthy. Domaine Henri Gouges is a touch less expensive than Domaine Chevillon for their top premier cru bottlings of Les St. Georges and Vaucrains, but still the better values here are their Clos des Porrets and Chaignots, as well as their excellent *villages* level wine. My favorite estate in Nuits St. Georges these days for value is Domaine Alain Michelot, whose wines are stellar and notably less expensive than those from the Chevillon or Gouges families, as they are simply less well-known in the market. At Domaine Michelot, one can buy the fanciest premier crus, such as Les St. Georges, Vaucrains and Les Cailles at lower prices than from the other two star domaines in Nuits, and beyond this the family has a wide range of other excellent premier cru bottlings to choose from, with three of my favorites from them being la Richemone, Champs Perdrix and their excellent Chaignots. Domaine Hudelot-Noëllat’s Nuits “Murgers” is also a consistently excellent wine and fairly reasonable in price. Also look for the Boudots bottling from Louis Jadot and the Procès bottling from Joseph Drouhin when hunting for excellent values in Nuits St. Georges.

In Pernand-Vergelesses, my current favorite estate based in the village is that of the Rollin family, as Domaine Rollin Père et Fils makes outstanding wines (again both reds and whites). They make a fine lineup of premier crus in Pernand (including from the finest premier cru *terroir* in the village, the Île de Vergelesses), but all of their wines are beautifully made and built for the cellar. There also appears to be a renaissance going on at Domaine Rapet in Pernand (certainly the most recent releases I have tasted are worlds above the quality of the 1985s I offered all those years ago), though I have not recently visited the cellars to get a firm feel on its depth or which of their red cuvées are my favorites, but good things are going on here today. One can also get superb Pernand *rouge* bottlings from some of the top estates in Savigny-lès-Beaune, including another beautiful example of Île de Vergelesses from Domaine Chandon de Briailles. Maison Louis Jadot has also long produced top flight examples from Pernand-Vergelesses and they too are one of the finest sources in the commune for long-aging and excellent red wines here. The red wines of Pernand-Vergelesses start out life structured and soil-driven (and need more bottle age than those from Marsannay to blossom), but they are, after all, “baby Cortons” and if given sufficient bottle age, they blossom into beautifully complex, complete and absolutely satisfying red Burgundies. I should take a moment to mention that in both Pernand-Vergelesses and its neighbor, Aloxe-Corton, there could well be several more domaines that should be listed here, but this is a pair of villages that I am only starting to visit with some regularity and I hope to be able to recommend several more estates here in the not too distant future. There are several domaines whose wines I was more familiar with back in the 1980s and early 1990s than I am today, and given how the wines from these two communes may have improved with generational changes at the helm and the influence from global warming, I will need to find a way to spend more time visiting producers in these villages in the years to come.

Savigny-lès-Beaune is probably the commune in this listing of principally red wine communes that I have the most experience with over the last fifteen years. It is also probably one of the most misunderstood communes in all of Burgundy (witness that it did not even make our

esteemed MW's list of values, when it is single-handedly probably responsible for the greatest number of outstanding red wine values to be found in all of Burgundy today!) and few Burgundy lovers really understand just how beautifully complex and elegant the red wines of Savigny are when they are fully mature. That is probably because they very capably hide their inherent elegance behind a rough and tumble veneer of structured rusticity when they are young, and it is only for those who have drunk mature examples of Savigny *rouge* to see past the chewy structures of the young wines to the hidden perfumed refinement that one routinely enjoys in mature bottles of red wine from Savigny-lès-Beaune. For, these wines are most assuredly structured and rather rustic when they start out life, with the clay in the soils here, not to mention the rather dramatically different expositions of the top vineyards (depending on which side of the valley of Savigny they happen to be placed) providing both early austerity and plenty of chewy tannin when the wines are first bottled. One cannot look for the nascent seductive appeal in a young Savigny that one can often find just south in many of the red wines of Beaune, but the elegance is buried here in so many examples and only waiting for time to work its magic and unlock these characteristics in the mature wines. For the patient, looking to build a cellar of well-priced and extremely ageworthy red Burgundies, Savigny-lès-Beaune is today's happy hunting ground in the Côte d'Or.



*Guillaume Camus of Domaine Camus-Bruchon, one of Savigny's greatest producers.*

At the present time, the two most famous domaines in Savigny-lès-Beaune are Domaine Simon Bize et Fils and Domaine Chandon de Briailles, both of whom make Savigny *rouge* bottlings as fine as any in the commune. But, these two estates are far from alone in making truly stunning red wines these days, as Domaine Jean-Marc et Hugues Pavelot and Domaine Camus-Bruchon produce wines that are every bit as refined and cellar-worthy as those of the commune's two most famous domaines. I also like very much the Savigny bottling from Domaine Antonin Guyon (who though based in this village, produces wines primarily from other communes) and a new domaine (to me) that I have been very impressed with of late is Domaine Serrigny in the village. Another bottling to keep an eye out for is the Savigny "les Vergelesses" from Maison Jaffelin, as since Marinette Garnier arrived here from Domaine Méo-Camuzet to take over the winemaking duties, the Jaffelin wines have been excellent and great values. Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret in Vosne-Romanée also makes an excellent and very ageworthy example of Narbantons in this village. There are also truly stunning bottlings of Savigny-lès-Beaune being produced today by both Maison Joseph Drouhin and Maison Louis Jadot, with the Drouhin family taking more and more interest in this commune in recent times and expanding their offerings from Savigny. But, they are not newcomers to the commune, as one of the bottlings of mature Savigny-lès-Beaune that really opened my eyes to the true quality of these wines was a 1971 Dominodes from the Drouhin family that I drank about twenty years ago and decided I damn well better start learning more about Savigny-lès-Beaune!

While it is not necessary to understand the geology of Savigny-lès-Beaune to chase down and build up the cellar with the best bottlings in the commune, differentiating between some of the various *terroirs* in the village, and particularly between the two sides of the valley, may make it easier for newcomers to the wines of Savigny to find some favorites early on in their tastings. The village of Savigny-lès-Beaune has eighteen premier cru vineyards, with twelve of them lying on the northern side of the commune's valley (and thus sharing a southerly exposition) and six are on the southern side of the valley and face northeast. As one drives out from Beaune to Savigny, one can easily appreciate the village's valley and the quite different expositions of the two sides. On the southern side of the valley, the four best known premier crus are Narbantons, les Peuillets, Marconnets and les Jarrons. The well-known la Dominode vineyard is a subsection of les Jarrons. One will generally find more structured wines that take longer to unfold on this side of the valley, due to both their northeasterly expositions and the preponderance of clay in the lower sections of a few of these vineyards (particularly les Peuillets). But, they are still excellent wines, just generally needing a few more years in the cellar to blossom than those on the northern side of the valley. To the north, we find twelve of the commune's premier crus, with the most famous being Fournaux, les Lavières, les Vergelesses, aux Gravains, Serpentières and les Guettes. All of these are great *terroirs*, and any of these bottlings from one of the top estates in the village (or from one of the top *négociants* now starting to specialize in Savigny) will produce a truly beautiful and complex wine when it is fully mature. There are also a couple of outstanding *villages* level vineyards on the northern side of Savigny that merit mention, as they often produce wines of premier cru quality and age almost as long as the best premier crus, thus representing even better value than the top premier crus. These two are Grands Liards (which lies just below the premier cru of les Lavières on the slope) and les Pimentiers. Domaine Camus-Bruchon has nearly one hundred year-old vines in each of these *lieux à dits* and is just one name to look for of these two fine bottlings. The Hospices de Beaune also has some excellent vineyard holdings in the village, so if the *eleveur* is top notch, these are also very much worthy of

attention. The best wines of Savigny will generally need eight to ten years of bottle age to properly start to blossom, casting off the slightly rustic structures of their youth and begin to show the inherent elegance of the wines from this commune. Most of the top premier cru bottlings can be counted on for at least fifty years of positive evolution in the cellar, which should be sufficient for most of us!

The next village south is the epicenter of the Côte d'Or, Beaune, which is widely loved for its beautiful small and ancient city, but which is often overlooked when scouring the vinous landscape in the region for good red wine values to tuck away in the cellar. As I wrote a two part series on the wines of Beaune back several years ago, I will refer readers to those articles for a more complete discussion of the commune's wines and the quality of its beautiful mosaic of vineyards. There is a lot of premier cru land in Beaune, with the vineyard limitations often a bit expansive, so one needs to pick and choose a bit here, but this does not discount the fact that there is a tremendously large supply of top flight Beaune wines being produced today that can serve as a beautiful foundation for a well-stocked and reasonably well-priced Burgundy cellar. These days, the three best-known red wine bottlings from Beaune are Maison Drouhin's Clos des Mouches, Maison Jadot's Clos des Ursules and Maison Bouchard Père et Fils "l'Enfant Jésus". All three are stellar wines, year in and year out, and age long and gracefully. Beyond these "big three" in Beaune, my favorite vineyards include les Grèves (where the l'Enfant Jésus" is located), les Cras, les Aigrots, Clos du Roi, Vignes Franches (where the Clos des Ursules is located), Champs Pimonts, Chouacheux, Theurons and Bressandes. Maison Louis Jadot has the most star-studded lineup of Beaune premier crus these days, having augmented their already stellar vineyard portfolio by purchasing several excellent premier cru parcels from the Germain family's Château de la Chorey-lès-Beaune several years ago. There are also excellent Hospices de Beaune bottlings from Beaune, with the finest being the Cuvée Maurice Drouhin and the Cuvée Nicolas-Rolin.

While the portfolios of Beaune premier cru bottlings from Maisons Drouhin, Jadot and Bouchard Père et Fils are deep and extensive, there are also several other important bottlings of Beaune that should be listed here as also very much worthy of inclusion in stocking a more value-oriented Burgundy cellar. There is an excellent Beaune "Bressandes" bottling from Hugues Pavelot and Beaune "Clos du Roi" from Guillaume Camus (both in Savigny), a lovely Beaune "Theurons" from Domaine Rossignol-Trapet in Gevrey, Beaune "Bressandes" from Louis Boillot in Chambolle, Beaune "Epenottes" from Maison Pierre Bourée et Fils in Gevrey and both Beaune "Grèves" and "les Aigrots" from Frédéric Lafarge in Volnay (not inexpensive, but less so than their Volnays). The Beaune "Sur les Grèves" Clos Ste. Anne bottling from Maison Jaffelin is also outstanding in recent years. When it comes to the premier cru vineyards of Beaune, one of the things to keep in mind is that generally, the lower third of the slope of several premier crus here is not always up to the same quality levels as the *terroir* in the upper sections of these vineyards. In large vineyards such as les Grèves and les Theurons, this is particularly evident and it pays to try and find out where in the vineyard the vines might lie for a bottling from the premier cru. Similarly, some of the premier crus that lie solely on the lower sections of the slope, such as les Tuvilains and les Reversées are generally not in the same league as the best premier crus. But, this is only a general rule, as for example, the vineyard of les Chouacheux lies far down on the slope and is often outstanding at Maison Jadot. Stylistically, the Beaune premier crus lying towards the Pommard border will give the bigger and more meaty

examples (with the Drouhin's Clos des Mouches being an exception), while one starts to see more plushness as one moves north through the heart of the slope. Within this large swath of Beaune premier crus in the heart of the *vignoble*, one gets more mineral drive from the upper slope wines and more round fruit lower down the slope. The top examples of Beaune easily last fifty to sixty years in the cellar and deliver excellent wines at full maturity, so they too are good sources of value in this day and age.

The next red wine village south of Beaune is Pommard, and this too is (today) one of the best communes for value in all the Côte d'Or. It is somewhat ironic that the two of the most popular villages in Burgundy at the start of the twentieth century, Pommard and Nuits St. Georges, have fallen so far out of favor with the market that these days they offer up outstanding values. My favorite estate in Pommard is Domaine Michel Gaunoux, where the family continues to make extremely long-lived wines and does not offer them up for sale until they have already had several years' worth of bottle age in their cellars. Their two flagship Pommards are their Grands Epenots and their Rugiens *Bas*, both of which are very worthy replacements for Côte de Nuits grand crus in the cellar, if one is looking to economize a bit with the Burgundy budget. The family also makes a very good Beaune *villages* bottling that I should have mentioned above, and a great Corton "Renardes" as well. Another outstanding source for great Pommard is Domaine Joseph Voillot, which is based in Volnay, but has superb holdings in this commune as well. The Charlot family are now the proprietors at Domaine Voillot, and they have excellent old vine cuvées in the top premier crus of Epenots, Rugiens and Pézerolles. The Voillot wines are an absolute bargain, and their equally impressive roster of Volnay premier crus also offers up outstanding value and great quality. Louis Boillot in Chambolle-Musigny also has a stellar lineup of Pommard bottlings in his cellar, with my favorite his les Croix Noires, though his Premiers and his Pommard *villages* are also excellent. There are also terrific Pommard premier cru bottlings to be found at Domaine Gilles Lafouge in Auxey-Duresses (les Chanlins) and Domaine Camus-Bruchon in Savigny (Clos des Arvelets). Additionally, both Maison Drouhin and Jadot make excellent examples from this commune. Pommard is a village where I do not have anywhere near as much experience as I should, so I have little doubt that there are several other very worthy producers whose wines should be listed here, but I just do not have experience with them (yet). I should also mention Domaine Courcel when discussing Pommard. These days they make wines in a Guy Accad style, with an extended "cold soak" prior to the onset of fermentation, which makes wines that stylistically are not really to my tastes (though others seem to like them). However, I sometimes see older vintages of the Courcel wines available at auction, and at least from the 1993 vintage and back, the domaine's wines were made in a very traditional style and were to be numbered amongst the very finest produced in Pommard, so their older vintages are very much worth looking out for at auction.

While it seems silly to cite Volnay as a "value" village these days, as the top estates here are now very much discovered and their prices reflect this. Back when I was still learning about the wines of the region, this was most emphatically not the case and I could list Domaine Marquis d'Angerville, Domaine Michel Lafarge and Domaine de la Pousse d'Or as amongst the very finest values to be found in all of the Côte d'Or, but times have changed. Today, the values in this village lie elsewhere, but they still exist. The aforementioned Volnays from Domaine Joseph Voillot remain excellent values, and these are among the small handful wines that can still be counted as relative values in this commune. Bertrand Glantenay also makes excellent

wines and his Volnay bottlings are more reasonably priced than many of his neighbors these days. His best Volnay premier crus are his Clos des Chênes and Caillerets, but his *villages* Volnay is also consistently fine. Monsieur Glantenay also makes some lovely Pommards that are also good values. While Chambolle-Musigny-based Louis Boillot's prices are higher than those of Domaine Joseph Voillot and Domaine Bertrand et Thierry Glantenay, his beautifully-made Volnays are still less pricey than the best-known producers in the village and can offer relative value. Their consistent excellence is self-evident. Domaine Clos de la Chapelle is also making stunning wines these days in Volnay and Pommard and they are priced below the most famous names in Volnay these days. The big three *négociants* of Joseph Drouhin, Louis Jadot and Bouchard Père et Fils also continue to make truly excellent examples of Volnay.



The next stops south from Volnay for red Burgundy values are the villages of Monthélie and Auxey-Duresses. These are two villages that I should also be better acquainted with than I am at the present time, as the only domaine I consistently visit in these two communes is the excellent and previously mentioned Domaine Gilles Lafouge in Auxey. Monsieur Lafouge's wines are truly exceptional, with his reds from Auxey-Duresses superb and very ageworthy, with les Duresses and la Chapelle my two favorites (but all of the red wines *chez* Lafouge are very much worthy of cellaring, including the Auxey AC *rouge*). Romain Taupenot of Domaine Taupenot-Merme in Morey St. Denis also makes excellent Auxey-Duresses *rouge*. Back fifteen years ago, one could even list the red wines from Jean-François Coche produced in Auxey-

Duresses and Monthélie as values, as they were truly undiscovered gems and quite inexpensive, even when the Coche-Dury white wines were already among the most expensive white Burgundies in the market. This is no longer the case, but they remain excellent in quality and very ageworthy wines and are at least worth mentioning. Monthélie is a commune that I hope to get to know better in the coming years, as there are some excellent vineyards here, but my experience is just not sufficient right now to recommend any particular domaine. The two premier crus in Monthélie that I have been most impressed with are les Duresses on the Auxey border and Champs Fulliot on the other side of the small village, lying next to Volnay and just over the border from the Clos des Chênes (and sharing many personality traits with its more famous Volnay neighbor). Maison Louis Jadot was making a terrific Monthélie “Champs Fulliot” back in Jacques Lardière’s day, but I do not know if they continue to produce it now. Dominique Lafon makes a superb Monthélie “les Duresses”, which is his best value red wine, but Domaine des Comtes Lafon’s pricing is not really in the value sector of the market.

Readers may have noticed that I listed Chassagne-Montrachet is a value-oriented commune, and this is particularly true for the top red wine bottlings in this village. Like Auxey-Duresses, Chassagne has definitely benefited from global warming for its red wines, which now achieve better phenolic ripeness each year than was the case a generation ago. There also seems to be more of an understanding of how to tailor one’s winemaking techniques to bring out the most positive side of pinot noir in Chassagne these days, so that the rather rustic red wines of yesteryear are much less often seen at the top domaines. The most cellar-worthy red produced in Chassagne these days, at least to my palate, is the la Cardeuse from Alex Moreau at Domaine Bernard Moreau. This is a beautifully structured, serious red for the cellar and a relative value. I also love the Chassagne *rouge* bottlings from Domaine Fontaine-Gagnard, with the family’s Clos St. Jean *rouge* my favorite of an excellent trio of bottlings (the red Chassagne *villages* is also very well made). Céline Fontaine is making great red wines, and I should have mentioned above that she also makes very fine Volnay “Clos des Chênes” and Pommard “Rugiens” that are also relative bargains. There are probably several other domaines in the Chassagne who are also making very good red wines these days, but these are the two that I am currently most familiar with and can highly recommend. I used to like (and regularly cellar) the red wines from Domaine Ramonet as well, but as Noël Ramonet blocked me from visiting the cellars here many years ago, I have lost track of how these red wines are these days.

Maranges, Santenay and Mercurey are also communes where one can find excellent red wine values. These are three communes that again, I do not know anywhere near as well as I should, but one can only cover so much ground in five or six weeks of tasting in the region, as I am not about to give up my appointments at Domaines Rousseau or Roumier just to expand my tastings in other villages! But, in each of these communes I have tasted some excellent red wine values, with Domaine Bachelet-Monnot in Maranges making some excellent red wines in Maranges and Santenay (as well as stellar Puligny-Montrachet *blancs*). In Mercurey, my favorite estate, hands down is Domaine Michel Juillot, whose wines are truly exceptional and will be cellar treasures a couple of decades down the road for those intrepid enough to put some in the cellar and let time work its magic. In Santenay, which to my palate, seems to be another commune where global warming has had a positive effect on the quality of the red wines (at least thus far), my experience is even less than in Maranges and Mercurey, but Olivier Lamy makes an excellent Santenay *rouge*, Maison Pierre Bourée et Fils up in Gevrey also makes a fine Santenay

“les Gravières” and Maison Joseph Drouhin is also doing nice work here. I should also put in a word about the red wines of Saint-Aubin as well, as the white wines from this commune will figure very prominently in our discussion of white Burgundy values at a later date. I have not had the pleasure to drink any mature Saint-Aubin *rouge*, but I have the sensation from tasting some of the newer vintages at Domaines Lamy and Henri Prudhon that Saint-Aubin *rouge* may also be benefitting from global warming and could be the next addition to a future article on fine red wine values in Burgundy. But, as these wines still start out life plenty structured, I will need to taste a few mature examples to get some idea if this is indeed the case.

Now, after a rundown of who my favorite producers and bottlings or red wines are in the less well-known villages of the Côte d’Or, let us circle back and take another crack at our young MW’s approach of buying the less famous wines from the most famous communes. There is some possibility for success in searching for value in this manner as well, but not necessarily in the way our enthusiastic MW cited. He or she opted for less well-known producers in each commune, but I feel that the route to success in these villages lies more directly in tackling the less well-known *terroirs* in these most famous of Burgundy villages, rather than the less well-known estates. I know I said at the outset that the best way to understand Burgundy is to approach it from the perspective of who the best growers are, but when we are searching for values, we have to also get to know which premier cru and top *villages* level vineyards are capable of making great wine in the right *vignerons*’ hands, but which are also currently overlooked a bit by the market and hence, offer up relative value. Returning again to the northern end of the Côte d’Or, we immediately hit upon the very famous commune of Gevrey-Chambertin. Given the prices these days from estates such as Domaine Rousseau and others in the commune, it does not seem that Gevrey would immediately offer up potential values, but there are indeed a great many options in this village that do provide excellent buying opportunities for those with a slightly more modest budget. As I wrote a big feature on the beautiful grand crus of Chapelle-Chambertin and Latricières-Chambertin last year, I will refer grand cru shoppers back to that article, as these two grand crus do indeed offer excellent potential for relative values *vis à vis* other grand crus in the village, beyond a few of the bottlings from the most famous producers in the two crus. Charmes-Chambertin in the best hands can also be stellar and a fine value. Less costly options of first rate Charmes include Maison Joseph Drouhin and Maison Pierre Bourée et Fils.

In the realm of Gevrey-Chambertin premier crus, one has to get out from the shadow of Clos St. Jacques to really start looking for values in the village, but there are indeed some excellent options here. Premier crus that are not really all that well respected these days in the market (and hence, offer relative value), include les Champeaux, les Cherbaudes, les Corbeaux, Petite Chapelle, Clos Prieur, la Perrière and Bel Air. All of these *terroirs* make very long-lived and compelling wines in the hands of the best producers. Les Champeaux is a vineyard whose wines I love, with Jean-Marie Fourrier making a stellar example. It is pricey, but less so than his Clos St. Jacques and an often equally compelling wine at full maturity. Domaine Harmand-Geoffroy also makes an excellent example of Champeaux, and this can be cellared for a significantly lower price than the Domaine Fourrier version. The Burguet brothers are another outstanding source for Champeaux. Maison Pierre Bourée et Fils also offers Champeaux from time to time and I have had some excellent bottles of this cru from them. Les Cherbaudes is a *terroir* whose personality I love a bit less in general than Champeaux, as the wines here can start

out a bit “weedy” in personality in certain vintages, but Louis Boillot in Chambolle-Musigny has a bottling of extremely old vine Cherbaudes that is truly stunning each and every year and would be my exception to the rule of weediness in Cherbaudes. Les Corbeaux is best-known these days for another very old vine version hailing from Denis Bachelet’s cellars, but Domaine Rossignol-Trapet also makes an outstanding bottling of Corbeaux. I also like Bruno Clavelier’s (based in Vosne-Romanée) version of les Corbeaux very much and would rank it as one of the best available and another good value.

Petite Chapelle is another stellar *terroir*, (which I would have written a feature on already if Covid had not intervened and blocked my 2020 spring trip to Burgundy), as this is one of my very favorite premier crus in all of the Côte de Nuits. Domaine Trapet, Domaine Rossignol-Trapet and Maison Louis Jadot are among the star producers of this superb premier cru, which ages as long and as gracefully as any premier cru in Gevrey. Clos Prieur is also a very fine premier cru (though half the vineyard is only entitled to *villages* status- though it too is one of the best AC parcels in Gevrey). Domaines Trapet and Rossignol-Trapet are two of the best Clos Prieur producers in the premier cru section and these bottlings are excellent values. A real sleeper is the Clos Prieur bottling from Domaine Harmand-Geoffroy, which is a blend of about half premier cru and the other half *villages* level production, but with the AC parcel planted to very old vines, which makes the overall quality of the wine premier cru to my palate and a great bargain. It cannot be sold as a premier cru with half of the blend from the lower section of the vineyard, but this is year in and year out a wine of premier cru quality and one of the best-kept secrets in the entire village. The premier crus of la Perrière and Bel Air are two more premier crus in Gevrey that can be terrific values, but I do not have a lot of experience with who the best producers are these days. La Perrière lies next to the premier cru section of Clos Prieur, right below Mazis-Chambertin, and it is an excellent *terroir*. Laurent Lignier made a great bottling of la Perrière from the 2006 through the 2015 vintage, after which he lost the lease on these vines, but back vintages can still be found in the market. The premier cru section of Bel Air is located just above Chambertin “Clos de Bèze” on the slope, contiguous with the Rousseau family’s grand cru of Clos des Ruchottes, so one can see that this is a very well-placed *terroir*. Morey St. Denis-based Romain Taupenot makes a superb example of Bel Air.

Premier crus from Gevrey-Chambertin, even if they are the more value-oriented bottlings in the village, are never going to offer the same value as one can find in the best premier crus from Savigny-lès-Beaune or Pernand-Vergelesses for example, but the previous list of suggestions shows that one can still cellar some truly brilliant wines in the village beyond the very best known domaines and premier crus vineyards on the *Combe de Lavaux* or the beautiful, but now very much discovered, les Combottes on the Morey St. Denis border. Gevrey-Chambertin also has plenty of ageworthy and value wines to be found below the level of premier crus, as one could argue that this large commune is home to some of the very highest quality *lieux à dits* bottlings in all of Burgundy, with only Meursault on the white wine side of the ledger able to boast so many top flight *Villages* level cuvées. Among my favorites is the beautiful vineyard of les Evocelles, which lies just over the border in the neighboring village of Brochon, but is entitled to be bottled as Gevrey-Chambertin, as the wine has been sold that way for centuries. To my palate, les Evocelles is always of premier cru quality in the hands of a top *vigneron*, with two of my favorite producers of les Evocelles being Louis Boillot and Denis Bachelet. Domaine Dugat-Py also makes a bottling of les Evocelles.

Another excellent bottling at the *villages* level that is often of premier cru quality is Gevrey-Chambertin “aux Etefois”, most of which lies just below Griotte-Chambertin on the slope. However, a small parcel of the vineyard actually extends up the slope into a corner of Griotte, and here you will find the Etefois vines of Domaine Rossignol-Trapet, where the Rossignol brothers make an excellent example. Right next to aux Etefois is the *lieu à dit* of Champs-Chenys, where Domaine Joseph Roty makes an outstanding wine. The Roty family’s other Gevrey *Villages* level bottling of la Brunelle is also excellent, and they also make a very good Clos Prieur from the AC section of the vineyard. Nearer the village center one finds the *lieu à dit* of en Jouise, where Domaine Harmand-Geoffroy produces another fine wine and superb value. The excellent *lieux à dits* of en Champs and Aux Vellé lie just below the premier cru of Champeaux at the base of the *Combe de Lavaux*, and Domaine Denis Mortet has long made outstanding wines from each of these.

Another outstanding *lieu à dit* in Gevrey-Chambertin is la Justice and its next door neighbor, Clos de la Justice, which is a *monopole* of Maison Pierre Bourée et Fils. Clos de la Justice is always a very good wine from the *maison* and is certainly the quality equivalent of many a premier cru in the commune. La Justice is quite a large vineyard, as it starts out right next to the *Route Nationale* in Gevrey, but stretches quite a ways to the east. I would assume that the best sections are those right next to the main roadway through Gevrey, but I have never actually checked with *vignerons* who make fine La Justice to ask where in the vineyard their vines happen to lie. Laurent Lignier is making a superb example of La Justice these days, Domaine Antonin Guyon in Savigny makes a fine La Justice as well, and Domaine Burguet has bottled this on its own in the past, though these days, it forms one of the building blocks of its two *villages* level bottlings of Gevrey. Beyond the named *lieux à dits* bottlings in Gevrey, there are also the deep waters of “Vieilles Vignes” bottlings from top estates in the commune, which too can often be of outstanding and offer premier cru level quality. The Burguet brothers’ “Mes Favorites” is one top example, as are the Vieilles Vignes bottlings produced by Denis Bachelet, the Harmand family, Sylvie Esmonin, the Mortet family and several others. So, I hope it is clear that one can definitely find some excellent value-oriented wines in the commune of Gevrey-Chambertin.

In the next village of Morey St. Denis, there are also plenty of values in the premier crus of the commune, which on average tend to be priced a level below those of comparable premier cru bottlings from either of the neighboring villages here, Gevrey or Chambolle. La Riotte is one premier cru that is very good value, with Domaine Taupenot-Merme and Laurent Lignier both making excellent examples. Domaine Philippe Jouan in Morey also offers up a couple of fine premier crus in the village that are good values. Elodie Michelot, of Domaine Alain Michelot in Nuits St. Georges also makes a very good Morey premier cru bottling of les Charrières that is well-priced. In Chambolle-Musigny, the popularity of the village’s top producers makes it harder and harder to come by “values” than was the case several years ago, but one can still get wines from Louis Boillot, Ghislaine Barthod and the Felettig family that are fairly-reasonably priced. Domaine Hudelot-Noëllat’s premier cru bottling of Charmes from this commune is also a relatively good value, in the broader context of Chambolle-Musigny pricing these days. However, for my palate, the very best value for a Chambolle premier cru actually lies just over the border in the commune of Vougeot, in the little known premier cru vineyard of “Petits Vougeots”. The *terroir* underneath Petits Vougeots is actually a continuation of the band of

limestone that defines Chambolle-Musigny, which lies immediately to the north of Petits Vougeots, so this is, for all intents and purposes, a wine of Chambolle, rather than Vougeot. If you do not believe me that Petits Vougeots is well-placed, consider that the premier cru just over the border from it in Chambolle happens to be les Amoureuses! Domaine Hudelot-Noëllat and Jean-Marie Fourrier are the finest producers that I know of in Petits Vougeots.



*There is a whole world of great red Burgundies beyond the most famous vineyards to be found, so explore!*

Vosne-Romanée is not a commune where quality and value often go hand in hand, as this is the most famous village in Burgundy and home to its most acclaimed and expensive red wines. This is also a commune where the general level of quality of the *villages* level bottlings is not quite as high as in several of its Côte de Nuits neighbors. My favorite *villages* here is from Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg, whose wines are now fully discovered and not inexpensive, but at the least the Vosne AC here is an outstanding example and can rival many a neighbors' premier cru in the town. Bruno Clavelier makes outstanding wines in this commune and he has three *lieux à dits* bottlings that might also fall in the realm of "values" here, as his Hauts Beaumonts, Combes Brûlées and Hauts Mazières are all excellent wines that are superior to some domaines' premier cru bottlings in the commune. Nuits St. Georges we have already gone into in quite some depth, as well as many of the red wine communes of the Côte de Beaune. So, other than red Corton, we have pretty well covered many of the value options in red Burgundy that are within my realm of experience (and which I can recall while writing this- I am sure that there are

plenty of which I am overlooking at the moment!). I did not omit the red wines of the Hill of Corton because they do not offer good value, as within the realm of grand crus, the best examples of Corton *rouge* are the very finest values to be found these days in all of Burgundy! But, as readers are no doubt aware, I have been working on a big feature on these wines for a coming issue and will not steal that article's thunder by detailing all of the fine values to be found in Corton. Before Covid hit, I had already lined up several vertical tastings of Corton for my cancelled trip from March of this past year, so as to put the finishing touches on that feature on the Hill of Corton. Once the pandemic retreats, I will get on the road to Burgundy again right away and hope to be able to finish up the article on Corton.

Of course, even armed with the following fifteen-plus pages of recommendations for how to build a Burgundy cellar without the discretionary income to only pay attention to the region's *crème de la crème* of cuvées is of little use, if one does not have a sense of how long such wines will need to rest in the cellar before they start to blossom. One of the things I learned decades into my Burgundy-buying days is that it is important to structure one's purchases to be able to take advantage of the staggered maturation times needed for different levels of wines. In many ways, this is like planting a good flower garden of perennials, as one wants to take advantage of when each type of flower is in bloom and be able to keep the garden full of blossoms from the late spring through to autumn. One of the things that I wish I had done more of when I was first building my own cellar is to have purchased more *villages* level bottlings in those early days. Back when Burgundy pricing was far different, I often succumbed to the temptation to only buy premier and grand crus for my cellar, which meant that when my curiosity inevitably overcame cellaring self-discipline (particularly when I only had a few vintages down in the cellar), I would start dipping into premier crus long, long before they were really mature. If I had bought some good AC level wines, they would have been more ready to drink when I gave into temptation, and my premier crus also would have had the opportunity to reach an even more beautiful stage of drinkability. So, with the understanding that each vintage in Burgundy has its own distinct parameters of aging and accessibility, here is a rudimentary timetable for planning on when to drink some of these new, red Burgundies with which you may have started to build your cellar foundation for the coming years.

*Villages* level wines generally need at least ten years out from the vintage date, in my experience, before they really start to drink well. More structurally accessible vintages like 2015 or 2017 will show well earlier than this, while more structured years like 2005 or 2010 will need at least this long (and often a bit longer) before the *villages* level wines from top producers really reach a good point to start drinking them. And contrary to much of what I read these days, good AC bottlings can easily last forty to fifty years, so one does not have to rush to drink them up at ten to fifteen years out from the vintage! Vieilles Vignes bottlings or some of the very best *lieux à dits* cuvées can even take a few more years to blossom than straight *villages* level wines. When we hop up to the level of premier crus, the age of twenty is generally a good point to start drinking them and expect a semblance of full maturity. For a handful of years, I was writing Burgundy vintage retrospective articles, tasting vintages at the fifteen year mark, which, in hindsight did not prove to be a very good idea. For, by the time I was writing my articles on these vintages, mostly what I was tasting was either premier or grand cru bottlings, and the wines still tended to be quite closed and often, in a period of rather sullen hibernation. This was true even for premier crus from villages we tend to think of as producing more forward wines like

Beaune, as even those wines at age fifteen beg for a bit more cellaring time. So, as a rule of thumb, try to plan to start drinking premier crus from age twenty onwards, if one is aiming to catch wines entering into their plateaus of maturity. Most top premier crus (and certainly all of the ones outlined above), will get at least fifty years out from the vintage- and many several decades longer- so there is really little reason to drink them before their time.

While this article has not discussed grand crus in the same detail as premier crus and *villages* level bottlings, as grand crus generally do not offer the same concept of “value”, one should plan to give grand crus that they may cellar fully twenty-five years out from the vintage before hoping to find them “mature” when opened. It is a rare vintage, such as 1987, where grand cru red Burgundies drink well significantly younger than this, and with the quality of winemaking at the top estates in the Côte d’Or probably at its highest level ever in our current age, one has to anticipate that a grand cru from a top producer is going to deserve plenty of bottle age. In certain vintages- those early 1985s that I cited at the outset of this article would be a good example- one can find a beautiful bottle of wine in a grand cru opened at an earlier age, but it is still only a certain percentage of the wine’s full potential and even a lovely 1985 at age eight or ten was nowhere near as good as the same wine would have been at age twenty-five or thirty-five! So, try to plan to have patience when pulling red Burgundies out of your cellar, as the real magic of these stellar wines is only found when combined with the incalculable improvement that comes with the passage of time.

There is one more thing to keep in mind when building a Burgundy section of the cellar. Red Burgundy, unlike many other top wines from other regions around the globe, tends to age in a non-linear manner and can go through extended periods where the wines seem muted and autumnal in personality and may feign early demise. There may be other regions’ wines that age similarly, but I cannot think of any off of the top of my head. But this type of evolution is so often seen with red Burgundies! One of these typical periods of closed development is often around the fifteen year mark out from the vintage, as I alluded to above. To return once again to the first great Burgundy vintage of my career, the 1985s, they were uncharacteristically forward throughout much of their first decade in bottle. The vintage was relatively low in acidity, so its early plushness was certainly not a surprise (and one of the reasons my first serious tasting group members were more than happy when I served top 1985s to them), but the wines went through a period from about age fifteen to twenty-five where they seemed relatively light, tiring and getting rather autumnal in personality, without that sappy fruit that made them so appealing when they were young. However, around age twenty-five, the sappiness returned (and is still with us) and it became clear that the previous decade had just been an extended “closed” phase for the top wines of the vintage. In this respect, I am speaking mostly to premier and grand crus from 1985, as I was not smart enough to buy any 1985 *villages* level bottlings for my own cellar and hence, do not have all that much experience with cellaring them.

As the 1985 vintage provided a relatively “accessible” style of red wines, it is easy to imagine that these periods of “closure” in the top wines of the vintage can last even longer with differently structured vintages, and in my experience, this can be particularly true of higher acidity vintages like 1996, 2005 or 2016. One simply has to be patient and give the wines from a given vintage the time they need to reach their periods of maturity, which like the 1985s, can seemingly come and go a bit, before they reach their ultimate plateaus. The 1996 reds took a bit

longer to close down than some vintages after they were first shipped, and they were absolutely beautiful to drink in their early days, albeit still quite primary in style. But, once they closed down, they did so with a vengeance, as the fruit was almost hermetically sealed behind a wall of acidity in so many of the wines during their closed phase of evolution. I had almost given up on the vintage, based on how closed they were during their period of hibernation, but as I wrote about a couple of years ago in an article on the 1996 reds, they have emerged again from their prolonged period of closure to again drink beautifully. The 1993s are another red Burgundy vintage that was almost impenetrable during its period of hibernation, and is still a touch on the young side today for my palate, but now blossoming nicely and not too far away from peak maturity. Today, it is the 2005s that are in this very, very closed phase and should be left unmolested in the cellar for the time being. So, one has to be patient and trust what one finds in the glass, when opening a wine during its first couple of decades in the bottle. If the temptation arises and a bottle of 2005 red Burgundy somehow finds itself materializing in a decanter, do not assume that the bottle is “off” or the vintage was “overrated” just because the wine in your glass is recalcitrant and pissed off at being opened too young! Trust your palate and just let the rest of the 2005s slumber in the cellar for an extended period of time before opening the next bottle. For, there is nothing more frustrating than finding that a vintage that one has lost faith with has finally blossomed into all of the promise it initially showed in its youth, only to find that you have drunk up most of your cache from that vintage before the wines reached their apogees! I did this with my entire purchase of 1992 red Burgundies, drinking all of them up in their most “weedy” phase (which was indeed herbaceous as hell early on!), without deriving a whole lot of pleasure from the wines and thinking that it was better to use them up before they became even nastier. In the end, the vintage came out of this period of herbaceousness to blossom into a beautiful set of wines, which continue to drink well to this day, but mine are long, long gone. Given the fact that I drank young 1992s like Christophe Roumier’s les Amoureuses and Bonnes-Mares, the Mugneret sisters’ Ruchottes and Clos Vougeot and Charles Rousseau’s Chambertin and Clos de Bèze in their least appetizing phase should be enough to convince you that I have sharply felt the sense of loss brought about by a lack of patience with red Burgundy in the cellar and want to encourage you to not make the same mistakes I made in the past!

So, here is my framework for how to navigate through today’s higher-priced Burgundy market and still assemble a very fine cellar of red wines from the Côte d’Or, if your own personal budget is not as extravagant as you might like to go Burgundy shopping today. I am not advocating that the best Savigny-lès-Beaune “Vergelesses” at full maturity is going to equal the same experience of a fully mature bottle of Musigny at the same point in its evolution, for there remains a very real hierarchy of *terroir* on which the foundation of the region has been accurately built over five hundred years. But, what I am suggesting is that you can drink very, very deeply at the well of red Burgundy today without having to cellar only the “best of the best” in the region, as the waters of Burgundy are very deep and wide and there are plenty of beautiful and very ageworthy wines still produced below the level of the “super nova” cuvées that have now become so expensive. All it takes is a willingness to explore the region beyond the best-known addresses and bottlings, forego the well-meaning advice of professionals that are still relatively new to the region, and most importantly, exercise the same degree of patience with some of these less well-known cuvées that you would allocate to fancier labels and allow them to reach their own apogees of peak maturity with extended time in the cellar.

**RECENTLY-TASTED AMERICAN WINES**  
**THE FIRST OF THE 2019 VINTAGE AND PLENTY OF OLDER WINES**



This new report on American wines was rather difficult to put together, as given the extreme devastation caused by the wildfires that swept through several western states in August and September of this year (and still smolder in some parts of California even as I write this in December), I was hesitant to reach out to many of the wineries and producers that I would normally be writing about at this time of year. I simply did not know who had been affected the most by this unprecedented rash of wildfires, which coupled with the surging coronavirus pandemic in the US, made it seem quite insensitive to write and inquire about the availability of samples of current releases. So, in some respects, I just let this article come together of its own volition, with a few inquiries sent out gently to producers asking about samples, but also urging them to not hesitate to declare that now was most emphatically not a good time to be contemplating samples if this were indeed the case. Across the globe, many, many businesses have been reeling from the ferocious pandemic, and this is most true here in the United States, where the virus has been allowed in many aspects to simply run its course unabated by orchestrated governmental actions to put up barriers to its murderous spread among the American population, and the devastating losses in both human life and economic activity have certainly been felt keenly by the American wine trade. Consequently, I was far from surprised

when I did not hear back from some wineries (and fully understood the myriad of possible reasons behind this) and very happy when I did receive responses from some who reported that they were holding the virus at bay, had managed to navigate the fire storms of autumn as well as possible and would be happy to send out some samples to my office. In addition to the folks that I did hear back from, I was also quite surprised to find several producers reaching out to me without my having written to them, asking when would be a good time to send along the new batch of samples. The combination of these two factors allowed this article to be completed and to cover a far wider range of wineries than I had initially anticipated would be possible when I first put my toe in the water and started sending out emails while the fires were still burning and photographs circulating from the regions hit by fire, with their eerie orange skies looking like hell on earth.

As I now tend to write about American wines at least a couple of times each year, I did not attempt to augment the samples that were shipped to me directly by touching base with more than one or two distributors here in New York about getting samples from them for inclusion in this particular article, as I ended up having plenty of bottles to work through. Covid has been brutally tough on the wine market throughout the US since it really started to rage in late March of this year, and with New York restaurants having always been a very big part of the wine market here in the metropolitan area, it has been a very difficult time for everyone in the trade and I wanted to try and be sensitive to this by not asking for too many samples during the never-ending pandemic. The New York market also took a further hit (beyond the surging virus) when one of the biggest and most important fine wine storage and delivery companies (based in New Jersey) was badly damaged by heavy winds during a storm in mid-November and the collapse of a roof and wall of one of the facilities largest warehouses was still very much adversely affecting the delivery of wines to merchants in the market as the Christmas season approached. Given this added layer of 2020's seemingly endless supply of challenges, I felt I should wait for the next feature on American wines to reach out to distributors here in the market for samples of their American wines and so, some of the wineries who are usually part of this winter report are not covered in the pages that follow. But, as several producers whose wines I had not tasted before had found me and asked about submitting samples, I had plenty of ground to cover with so many new to me wineries to discover in writing this report.

One of the new wineries (to me) whose wines grace these pages is that of Ravines Wine Cellars in the Finger Lakes region of New York. A friend of mine, Pascaline Lepeltier, had told me a few years back that I really should find time to taste some of the producers in the Finger Lakes region, as I would really like what I tasted. I did not doubt Pascaline's recommendation at all, but had not found the time to do so until Ravines reached out to me to see if I would be amenable to receiving samples from them and I was delighted that they did! The winery sent me a nice range of wines, all of which showed beautifully and I was so impressed with what I tasted that I posted a note on Twitter about how well the wines had shown. This led to one of the folks that follows me on Twitter mentioning that he too liked the wines from Ravines very much, and if I liked their wines, I might also enjoy tasting the wines from Forge Cellars, who is another one of the top producers in the Finger Lakes region. As I had loved the Ravines wines, I saw no reason not to reach out to the team at Forge Cellars to see about tasting a few samples of their wines and they very generously responded by sending me fully a dozen different bottlings of dry rieslings, most of them single vineyard cuvées, as well as three additional red wines. As was the

case with the wines from Ravines, I was mightily impressed with the quality of everything I tasted from Forge Cellars and am delighted that I have finally been able to get some top wines from the Finger Lakes included in this report on American wines.

I was also able to taste samples from several other new (to me) wineries from the west coast of the US for this report, as a small handful of wineries reached out to me in the autumn and asked if I would be interested in tasting wines from them. Thanks to the efforts from these folks, I was able to taste wines from several properties whose wines I was very impressed with, including Fullerton Wines in Oregon, Bee Hunter Wines in Anderson Valley, Madson Winery in the Santa Cruz Mountains, OO Wines in the Willamette Valley and Maison d'Amis in Napa Valley. All of these producers are making outstanding wines in a very classical style, with the average quality level from these producers being excellent and all of them producing at least a handful of truly stellar young wines that will help these wineries take their rightful place in due time amongst the longer-established roster of the very finest producers in the US. Some of these wineries are specializing essentially in one or two varieties- Maison d'Amis with cabernet sauvignon, OO Wines primarily with chardonnay (though they also make a bit of superb pinot noir) and Fullerton Wines primarily with pinot noir- while others such as Bee Hunter are producing truly excellent wines across a fairly wide spectrum of different grape varieties (pinot gris, chardonnay, pinot noir, syrah and zinfandel). I have little doubt that their wines will impress readers who search them out, as there were some truly stellar young wines sent to me from these estates. This report also allowed me to get caught up on some recent releases from wineries that I used to taste back in the day, but had not seen recent vintages from in many a long year, including Domaine Anderson, Merry Edwards Winery and Diamond Creek Vineyards.

The article also includes notes on another new winery in Oregon, Corollary Wines, who is solely producing sparkling wines from grapes grown in the Willamette Valley. The proprietors are Jeanne and Dan Diephouse and their first vintage at Corollary are the newly released 2017s, which are just hitting the market. As I was very much impressed by their first commercial releases, I wanted to take a moment in the introduction to write about their wines a bit more than what will fit in a tasting note. I sampled their four 2017 bottlings: one a blended wine called "Cuvée One" and three single vineyard bottlings. All four were excellent in quality and augured very well for the future, given that this was their very first vintage release. For their first vintage, the *vins clairs* for the Corollary Wines did not undergo malolactic fermentation, were given six months of aging on their fine lees in cask prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation and aged for a year and a half *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. Dan Diephouse notes that these practices will be extended out in the coming years, with the ultimate goal to give the *vins clairs* fully ten months in barrel prior to bottling and aging *sur latte* to eventually stretch to three years for all of Corollary's bottlings. But, as the winery is just up and running with the release of the 2017s, they were not aged quite as long before disgorgement as will be the case in future vintages.

Some of the newest releases to arrive here in December included wines from the 2019 vintage in Oregon. While it was only a handful of wines that I tasted for this report, I was excited to start seeing some of the 2019s, as I had heard very good things about this classically "cooler" vintage and the potential inherent in this year. It was a rather wet year by recent standards in the Willamette Valley in 2019 (more like the old days here), with flowering a couple of weeks

behind the last several vintages, but conducted under cooler temperatures and clear and sunny skies. There was heavy rains from the end of June well into July, which forced growers to be vigilant against mildew pressures. There were no real heat spikes in 2019, so sugar accumulations were slow and steady up until harvest in the back half of September and early October and the wines seem to have ripened up nicely, though lower in octane in general than the comparable 2018, with really lovely purity, soil inflection and precise fruit tones. I tasted a nice range of Kelley Fox's 2019 single vineyard pinot noir bottlings and the structural tension, lower octane and seamless balance of the wines across the board augurs extremely well for their long and very, very positive evolution in bottle. I am very much looking forward to tasting more 2019s from the Willamette Valley in the first half of this coming year and discovering how other of my favorite estates here captured the beautiful potential of the 2019 vintage!

Given all of the uncertainty that surrounds the 2020 vintage, due to the unprecedented scale of the wildfire damage in California, Oregon and Washington this year, it seems a bit of poetic justice that the 2019 vintage seems to be showing such immense potential. Several of the producers I have spoken with about the fires are uncertain how all of the smoke will end up affecting the wines of 2020. Some have already taken the extremely hard decision to forego producing wines in 2020, while others are making the wines and taking a wait and see approach to see how they eventually start to show with some barrel aging in the cellars. At the point of writing, it seems very likely that some producers will decide to bottle some of their 2020s, perhaps as blends (rather than single vineyard cuvées) or in smaller quantities than is customary, making draconian decisions in the cellar to ensure that only the best of the vintage will be released under their labels. Others report that so far the wines are not showing smoke taint and seem to be evolving relatively well in cask, so there is hope that some producers may be able to make a pretty good run at the vintage of 2020. However, it seems likely that we may see a more gradual release of the 2019 vintage from some producers, holding back some of their 2019s to release a bit later in the market, which will ensure that they have some sense of how the 2020s in their cellars are shaping up (or not) before emptying the winery stocks of their 2019s. It is a very difficult time for winegrowers affected by the wildfires of 2020 and we all need to be as empathetic as possible to their plight, while still keeping an eye out for the release dates of the best wines of 2019.

The 2019 vintage is also looking quite good in northern California wine country. The growing season was a bit different than in Oregon, as there was some *fin de saison* high temperatures that pushed sugars up briskly at harvest time, but the crop was big, so a little push over the finish line was not necessarily a bad thing. Sonoma County had the complication of the very destructive Kincade Fire in October of 2019, which generally did not affect the harvest, as most of the grapes had been already brought into wineries before the fire started on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. In this regard, cabernet sauvignon producers in Sonoma had been relatively lucky in 2019, compared to two years earlier, when much of the 2017 crop of that variety was largely unpicked and still out on the vine when that year's wildfires ripped through the region, dramatically cutting back on much of the 2017 cabernet sauvignon crop. Concerns of smoke taint in the 2017 cabernet sauvignon crop have plagued the wines ever since, so producers were relieved that they did not have to relive that same scenario with the Kincade Fire in October of 2019. This is particularly true, given the even greater damage of the wildfires of 2020 that have been yet another cataclysmic event in a year that has been far too generous in generating cataclysms.



*Cathy Corison's Kronos Vineyard, in the heart of the Rutherford Bench section of Napa Valley.*

The following notes are organized by varietal, with American Sparkling Wines grouped together first, followed by various white wines and the sections on major red wine varietals. Each section is organized in its customary manner, with the wines grouped first by vintage, and then alphabetically by producer within each vintage subset. In cases where I have received several different single vineyard bottlings from a single producer, I have generally listed the wines alphabetically by their vineyard, unless I was already aware of a relative quality hierarchy of the various single vineyard cuvées, in which case I have listed the wines in the order that a winegrower might have chosen to serve them if I had been visiting the winery to taste.

### ***American Sparkling Wines***

#### **2019 Bryn Mawr Vineyards Sparkling Rosé (Willamette Valley)**

Just over half of the *cépages* of the 2019 Bryn Mawr Vineyards Sparkling Rosé is pinot noir that hails from the cool Van Duzer Corridor (fifty-two percent), with the remainder from Eola-Amity Hills vineyards. The balance of the cuvée is composed of twenty-eight percent pinot gris, seventeen percent tempranillo and three percent Maréchal Foch. The wine is barrel-fermented in neutral casks and carries 6.8 grams per liter of residual sugar. It is a lovely, deep salmon color and offers up a vibrant nose of strawberries, rhubarb, a touch of rye bread, salty soil tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and juicy on the

attack, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and a long, quite dry and well-balanced finish. This is a Pet Nat that is made for the table. Good juice. 2020-2030. **87.**

### **2018 Bravium Wines Blanc de Noirs “Wiley Vineyard” Brut Nature (Anderson Valley)**

This is Derek Rohlffs’ first sparkling wine release, composed entirely of pinot noir from the superb Wiley Vineyard. The *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts, aged ten months in cask prior to bottling for secondary fermentation. The wine finished with residual sugar of less than three grams per liter. It offers up a refined bouquet of white peach, brioche, a lovely base of soil, just a whisper of oak and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is zesty, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a good core, fine mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is very good- let us hope Derek continues this project! 2020-2040+. **92.**

### **2017 Corollary Wines “Cuvée One” Vintage Brut (Willamette Valley)**

The 2017 Cuvée One Brut from Corollary Wines is composed of a blend of fifty percent pinot noir, thirty-two chardonnay and eighteen percent pinot blanc, sourced from five different vineyards across the Willamette Valley. The *vins clairs* are fermented with indigenous yeasts, do not go through malo and were aged for six months prior to blending, in a combination of seventy-five percent older casks and twenty-five percent stainless steel tanks. It was aged *sur latte* for eighteen months prior to disgorgement in December of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. It offers up a bright and expressive bouquet of pear, bread dough, lovely soil tones, just a whisper of oak and a gently musky floral topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, fine balance and grip and a long, complex finish. I really like this wine, but to my palate, it is still fairly youthful and I would be inclined to give it a bit more bottle age before drinking it in earnest. It should age very well indeed. 2023-2040+. **90+.**

### **2017 Corollary Wines “Namaste” Blanc de Blancs Vintage Brut (Van Duzer Corridor)**

The chardonnay vines in the Namaste Vineyard in the cool Van Duzer Corridor were planted in 1980. The *vins clairs* for this bottling are barrel-fermented and entirely raised in two older barrels for six months prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. The wine was disgorged in December of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of eleven grams per liter. The nose jumps from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, a fine base of minerality, dried flowers, citrus zest and a discreet touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a lovely core and mineral drive, refined *mousse*, excellent cut and grip and a long, poised and very well-balanced finish. This is quite approachable in its youthful zestiness, but it too is a young wine and really deserves some bottle age to allow its secondary layering to emerge. Very impressive juice! 2023-2045+. **92.**

### **2017 Corollary Wines “Cattrall Brothers” Vintage Brut Rosé (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The Cattrall Brothers Vineyard was the first certified organic vineyard in Oregon, having been planted in the 1970s. This is entirely pinot noir (all Wadenswil clone), with five percent still red wine added in for color. There is only a single cask, which is barrel-fermented and aged six months prior to bottling for secondary fermentation. It too was disgorged in December of 2019, with a finishing *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine is a lovely salmon color and offers up a beautiful bouquet of raspberries, watermelon, a touch of rhubarb, salty soil tones, orange peel, gentle spices and a topnote of rose petal. On the palate is bright, full-bodied and very nicely

balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, with zesty acids, fine focus and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is excellent Rosé! 2020-2040. **92+**.

**2017 Corollary Wines “Momtazi Carbonic” Vintage Brut Rosé (McMinnville)**

The biodynamically-farmed Momtazi Vineyard is one of my favorite in all of Oregon, with such luminaries as Brienne Day and Kelley Fox producing wines from its fruit. This wine is entirely made with pinot noir, which undergo eight days of carbonic maceration for color, prior to pressing and barrel-fermentation. The *vins clairs* are aged in older casks for six months, bottled up and given eighteen months aging *sur latte*; disgorgement was in December of 2019 and the finishing *dosage* for this bottling was six grams per liter. As this is done with carbonic maceration, it is a bit deeper in color than the Cattrall Brothers Rosé, but equally vibrant on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, blood orange, a bit of rye bread, a lovely base of minerality and a topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a good core, lovely soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is the more vinous of the two Corollary Rosé bottlings and is really built for the table! Fine juice. 2020-2040. **92**.

**2013 Wenzlau Vineyard “Cuvée l’Inconnu” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Santa Rita Hills)**

This is the first sparkling wine produced and released from Wenzlau Vineyard, with the *vins clairs* bottled up in July of 2014 and the wine disgorged in May of 2018. The bouquet is complex and vibrant, offering up scents of lemon, apple, bread dough, a fine base of salty soil tones, citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. For a first attempt at sparkling wine, color me impressed! I hope there are more vintages of Blanc de Blancs resting comfortably in the cellars at Wenzlau! 2020-2040. **92**.

**2012 Ravines Wine Cellars Sparkling Wine Vintage Brut (Finger Lakes)**

The 2012 Ravines Sparkling Wine is composed of a blend of chardonnay and pinot noir (all grown in the beautiful limestone soils of the Argetsinger Vineyard) and was aged *sur latte* for nearly six years prior to its disgorgement in the spring of 2018. The wine delivers lovely aromatics in its bouquet of apple, lemon, a fine base of chalky soil tones, fresh-baked bread and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, zesty and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, lovely mineral drive and cut, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is really good bubbly! 2020-2040. **91**.

***Sémillon and Sauvignon Blanc***

**2019 Sauvignon Blanc & Sémillon- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

This year, David Jeffrey’s white wine is composed of a blend of seventy-four percent sauvignon blanc and twenty-six percent sémillon, with everything barrel-fermented and the wine coming in at a svelte 12.9 percent octane. The bouquet is bright and classy, wafting from the glass in a mix of grapefruit, lemon, fresh-cut grass, a touch of beeswax, a nice base of soil and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full and complex, with a lovely core, excellent focus and balance, zesty acids and a long, classy finish. This is a lovely example. 2020-2028. **90**.



### **2018 Sauvignon Blanc “Russian River Valley”- Merry Edwards Winery**

The 2018 Sauvignon Blanc from Merry Edwards is barrel-fermented and was raised in eighteen percent new oak in this vintage. It offers up a ripe and vibrant nose of gooseberry, lime, fresh-cut grass, a touch of tarragon, citrus peel and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a good core of fruit, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and very nicely balanced finish. This is a very tasty bottle of sauvignon blanc, with plenty of personality. 2020-2026. **89.**

### **2017 Sémillon “Coury Old Vine”- Golden Cluster (Willamette Valley)**

The 2017 Sémillon “Coury Old Vine” from Jeff Vejr at Golden Cluster is outstanding, offering up great aromatic depth and complexity in its bouquet of fresh figs, lemon, paraffin, a touch of petrol, a fine base of soil tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with fine acids and grip, lovely balance and a long, vibrant and youthfully complex finish. This is a fine bottle in the making, but I would still let it age a few more years and more completely blossom on the backend, as it remains a touch tight-knit at age three. It is going to age long and very gracefully. 2022-2040+. **92.**

### ***Pinot Gris and Chenin Blanc***

#### **2019 Pinot Gris “Three Otters”- Fullerton Wines (Willamette Valley) screwcap**

The 2019 Pinot Gris “Three Otters” from Fullerton Wines is fermented and raised solely in stainless steel tanks, with the wine spending six months aging on its fine lees prior to racking and bottling. The 2019 comes in at 12.5 percent octane and offers up a wide open bouquet of peach, apple, a touch of dried flowers, soil and a topnote of sweet nuttiness. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and tangy, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. This is not overly complex, but it has plenty of personality. 2020-2025. **88.**

#### **2019 Chenin Blanc- Maison d’Amis (Clarksburg)**

The 2019 Chenin Blanc from Maison d’Amis is one of the lowest octane white wines I have seen out of California in a long time, as it comes in listed at 11.1 percent alcohol! The wine is medium-bodied and fresh in personality, offering up a bouquet of quince, lemon peel, salty soil tones and lanolin. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-bodied and tasty, with sound framing acids and good mineral drive. This is pretty high-toned in personality and primary today, but it has surprisingly good intensity of flavor for such low octane and may well develop more complexity with a bit of bottle age. It is not bad by any means, but could end up even better than it is showing at the present time, if more complexity arrives with cellaring. 2020-2030. **88+.**

#### **2017 Pinot Gris “Filligreen Farms”- Bee Hunter (Anderson Valley) screwcap**

The pinot gris from Filigreen Farm is grown biodynamically, like all other crops on the ranch in Anderson Valley (please note that the label for the wine says “Filligreen Farms”, but the actual name of the ranch is Filigreen Farm and this is also how the wine is referred to on the Bee Hunter website; I am not sure of the history behind the different spellings between label and farm). The 2017 Bee Hunter Pinot Gris from the farm is lovely, coming in at 13.2 percent octane and offering up a vibrant aromatic blend of peach, lemongrass, beeswax, a nice base of soil tones and a lovely sheen of herbal elements that recall basil and watercress. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and full-bodied, with good acidity and grip, a fine core and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. Though this wine is three years out from the harvest and sealed under the screwcap, the only effect I can discern is a slightly clipped finish when the wine is first opened, but this is nicely ameliorated with fifteen minutes in decanter. This is a fine example of pinot gris and really deserves to be sealed under a natural cork, as it has fine capacity to age. 2020-2025+. **90.**

### ***Riesling***

#### **2019 Dry Riesling “Classique”- Forge Cellars (Seneca Lake)**

The Classique bottling of Dry Riesling from Louis Barruol and Richard Rainey is their workhorse bottling, being made of a blend from all of the different vineyards with which they work on the eastern shore of Seneca Lake. The bouquet of the 2019 offers up a zesty blend of green apple, petrol, lime peel, a fine base of wet stone soil tones and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and focused, with good bounce and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is a lovely entry level bottle of riesling. 2020-2040. **87+.**

#### **2019 Dry Riesling “Bellows”- Forge Cellars (Seneca Lake)**

The windswept Bellows Vineyard is densely-planted on a base of clay, limestone and shale. Forge’s 2019 Dry Riesling bottling from here is lovely and quite defined by its underlying minerality, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of lime, apple, chalky minerality, dried flowers, citrus peel and a hint of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full

and racy, with a superb core of fruit, excellent cut and grip and a long, focused and complex finish. This is excellent riesling in the making, but I would be inclined to let it blossom completely with a few years' worth of bottle age. Fine juice. 2023-2045. **92.**

**2019 Dry Riesling “Breakneck Creek”- Forge Cellars (Seneca Lake)**

The Breakneck Creek Vineyard is not quite as high in elevation as the Bellows Vineyard, and the soils do not have the same limestone strata in them, being a blend of gravelly loam and shale. Forge Cellars has only been making a single vineyard bottling of riesling here since the 2017 vintage, so this is one of their newer cuvées, but the 2019 has turned out beautifully. The bouquet delivers a fine blend of lemon, quince, a fine base of salty soil tones, citrus peel and a topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is fullish, bouncy and tightly-knit, with a good core, fine soil signature and grip, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex and nicely balanced finish. This has the weight of good dry riesling, but aromatically, it reminds me of a young, dry chenin blanc-based wine from Montlouis. This is young and will demand a bit of cellaring to start to show all of its layers of complexity, but it will be a lovely drink in due course. 2023-2045. **91+.**



**2019 Dry Riesling “Caywood”- Forge Cellars (Seneca Lake)**

The Caywood Vineyard’s riesling vines were planted in the early 1970s by Charles Fournier, who had been hired away from Veuve Clicquot at the end of prohibition to charter the then uncharted territory in the Finger Lakes for *Vinifera* varieties. The topsoils here are meager, with the roots soon reaching the Mother Rock of shale. The 2019 Caywood Vineyard bottling

offers up a refined aromatic constellation of tart orange, lime, a touch of fennel, wet stone minerality, citrus peel and lemongrass. On the palate the wine is zesty, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a fine girdle of acidity and mineral drive, excellent focus and grip and a long, youthful and very promising finish. This is one of the more reserved single vineyard bottlings of Dry Riesling in the 2019 lineup from Forge, and I would definitely tuck it away in the cellar for a couple of years and let it blossom properly. Fine juice in the making. 2023-2045. **90+**.

**2019 Dry Riesling “Freese”- Forge Cellars (Seneca Lake)**

The Freese Vineyard lies immediately to the north of the Breakneck Vineyard, with Forge first starting to bottle this riesling on its own in the 2018 vintage. The 2019 Freese is lovely, with a nice sense of restraint out of the blocks that augurs very well for its future evolution in bottle. The nose delivers a classy mix of green apple, lemon, a nice touch of salinity in its complex base of soil, dried flowers and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and has as great core of fruit, with zesty acids, impressive backend mineral drive and grip and a long, complex and energetic finish. This is excellent juice. 2020-2045+. **93.**

**2019 Dry Riesling “Leidenfrost”- Forge Cellars (Seneca Lake)**

The 2019 Dry Riesling from the Leidenfrost Vineyard is one of my favorites from their excellent lineup of single vineyard bottlings this year. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of tart orange, pink grapefruit, lemongrass, a fine base of stony minerality, a touch of citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, racy, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent cut and grip, a superb girdle of acidity and a long, complex and very classy finish. The backend lift here is most impressive! First class juice. 2020-2045. **93.**

**2019 Dry Riesling “Navone”- Forge Cellars (Seneca Lake)**

The Navone Vineyard was planted in the mid-2000s, so this parcel is just starting to ease into its first days of maturity. The soils here are gravelly silt over shale, with the stone here less prevalent in several of its neighbors. The cellar team at Forge chooses to raise this wine in used *demi-muids*, rather than the Burgundy-sized casks in which most of the single vineyard rieslings spend their *élevage*. The 2019 Navone delivers a bright and classy nose of quince, tart orange, a hint of beeswax, salty soil tones, wild fennel and a topnote of dried flowers. Like the Breakneck Creek bottling, this reminds me aromatically a bit of Montlouis. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and bouncy, with a good core, fine soil signature and grip, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex finish. Structurally, this is quite wide open out of the blocks, but it has layers of complexity still hidden away, so some time in the cellar will pay dividends, despite the wine drinking very nicely out of the blocks. 2020-2040+. **91.**

**2019 Dry Riesling “Railroad”- Forge Cellars (Seneca Lake)**

The Railroad Vineyard was planted in 1995, so these vines have now, as the French would say, reached a *bonne age*. The soils in this parcel are loam and shale and the 2019 riesling here from Forge offers up a precise and classy nose of green apple, lime, a hint of fresh-cut grass, orange peel, a lovely base of soil tones and a topnote of wild fennel. On the palate the wine is bright, focused and full, with a rock solid core, great mineral drive and cut, snappy acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This has more than a hint of Sancerre personality to it, despite being made out of riesling and grown on shale! Superb juice. 2020-2045. **92+**.

**2019 Dry Riesling “Sunrise Hill”- Forge Cellars (Cayuga Hill)**

The Sunrise Hill Vineyard bottling of Riesling from Forge Cellars was first bottled in the 2014 vintage, but this is not in their customary neighborhood, as this vineyard is found on the west bank of Cayuga Lake. The soils here are loam and clay, rather than the shale found on the

eastern side of Seneca Lake. The 2019 Sunrise delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of gooseberry, lime, white flowers, a lovely base of soil, discreet notes of cress and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and has plenty of mid-palate depth, with lovely soil signature and grip, zesty acids and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is not quite as elegant in personality as some of these other single vineyard bottlings from Forge, but it is long on personality and will age beautifully. 2020-2045. **91+**.

**2019 Dry Riesling “Wagner Caywood East”- Forge Cellars (Seneca Lake)**

The Wagner Caywood East bottling of riesling from Forge Cellars made its debut in the 2018 vintage, so this is its sophomore year in their lineup. The vineyard rises to nearly a thousand feet in elevation and is planted on a topsoil of loam over a bedrock of shale. The bouquet is lovely, offering up plenty of early personality in its mix of green apple, citrus peel, salty minerality, a touch of menthol, wild fennel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impeccably balanced, with a lovely girdle of acidity, fine focus and grip and a long, refined and soil-driven finish. This is one of the more generous single vineyard bottlings out of the blocks, but it will have no difficulties aging long and gracefully as well- as long as one can keep their hands off of bottles in the cellar! Fine juice. 2020-2045. **91+**.

**2019 Dry Riesling Willow”- Forge Cellars (Seneca Lake)**

The Willow Vineyard is planted less than half a mile from the edge of Seneca Lake, so benefits nicely from its positioning with lovely ripeness each year. The 2019 version is bright and extroverted in personality, with the nose wafting from the glass in a mix of green apple, gooseberry, fresh-cut grass, a fine base of soil tones, citrus peel and a nice touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and wide open, with a good core, a fine girdle of acidity, excellent balance and a long, complex finish. This has some Pouilly-Fumé shadings to its personality. Good juice. 2020-2040. **90**.

**2019 Dry Riesling “les Alliés”- Forge Cellars (Seneca Lake)**

The Forge Cellars’ les Alliés bottling of Riesling is a barrel selection from the various single vineyard bottlings the winery produces. It is made by putting together the bottles that really show well during the winter’s *élevage* and which work well together. The 2019 version of les Alliés offers up a lovely and refined nose of lime, grapefruit, dried flowers, a lovely base of soil tones and a nice touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core, fine mineral undertow, zesty acids and outstanding backend energy on the long and very well-balanced finish. This is excellent. 2020-2045. **93**.

**2017 Dry Riesling- Ravines Wine Cellars (Finger Lakes)**

Morten Hallgren and his wife Lisa run this lovely winery in Geneva, New York, in the heart of the Finger Lakes, which they first opened in 2001. Morten’s family owns an estate in Provence and he has degrees in oenology and viticulture from Montpellier University. Lisa is a professional chef, so this is probably a very good winery to visit when Lisa can man the stoves for guests. Their riesling vineyards are planted on limestone and shale, in the hills overlooking Seneca Lake. Their 2017 Dry Riesling comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a precise and complex bouquet of green apple, gooseberry, chalky minerality, a hint of petrol, lime peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, fullish and complex, with a fine core, lovely balance and grip and a long, zesty and very refined finish. A great value. 2020-2035. **90**.

### **2016 Dry Riesling “Argetsinger Vineyard”- Ravines Wine Cellars (Finger Lakes)**

The Argetsinger Vineyard was planted in the 1960s and 1970s, so these are some of the oldest riesling vines in the Finger Lakes region. They are planted on a rare foundation of almost pure limestone, with just a thin layer of gravel on top. The 2016 bottling from Morten Hallgren is outstanding, offering up a pure, complex and vibrant aromatic constellation of green apple, lime, a touch of pear, beautiful chalky soil tones, a hint of mossiness (think Brauneberg on the Mosel), petrol, wild flowers and a nice dollop of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with a lovely soil signature, a fine girde of acidity, excellent balance and grip and a long, complex and quite serious finish. The weight and palate impression recall Alsace, but this is quite a bit drier than many wines from Alsace these days. This is first class dry riesling. 2020-2035. **92.**



### ***Chardonnay***

#### **2019 Chardonnay “Anderson Valley”- Bravium Wines**

The 2019 “Anderson Valley” bottling of chardonnay from Derek Rohlffs at Bravium is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a nicely ripe and vibrant bouquet of peach, apple, fruit blossoms, a fine base of soil and a gentle foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and nicely peachy in personality, with a fine core of fruit, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and juicy finish. This is very tasty right out of the

blocks, but has a good spine of acidity and should have no difficulties aging gracefully. 2020-2030. **90+**.

**2019 Chardonnay “Russian River Valley”- Bravium Wines**

Derek’s 2019 Russian River cuvée of chardonnay is also a fine example, with a bit more apple and citrus in its personality than the lovely peachy tones found in the Anderson Valley bottling. The nose is pure and precise, jumping from the glass in a classy blend of apple, a touch of tangerine, lovely soil signature, gentle vanillin oak and a topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and has a nice core of ripe fruit, with a good girdle of acidity, lovely balance and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is a touch more youthfully primary out of the blocks than the 2019 Anderson Valley chard this year, so I might be inclined to give this a year or two in the cellar and drink the Anderson Valley in the meantime. Good juice. 2022-2030+. **90+**.

**2019 Chardonnay “Sonoma Coast”- Kutch Wines**

The 2019 Sonoma Coast bottling of chardonnay from Jamie Kutch hails entirely from the Bohan Vineyard, with these chardonnay vines having been planted in 1972. The wine is barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised twenty percent new oak this year and offers up a lovely bouquet of pear, apple, a lovely base of soil tones, gently musky floral tones (honeysuckle?), a touch of orange zest and a very refined framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, zesty acids and a long, focused and nascently complex finish. This is an excellent bottle of chardonnay that deserves a few years’ worth of bottle age to allow its secondary layers of complexity to fully emerge. Fine, fine juice. 2022-2035+. **93**.

**2019 Chardonnay “Trout Gulch Vineyard”- Kutch Wines (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

The Trout Gulch Vineyard chardonnay is almost as old as that in Bohan Vineyard, as these vines were planted back in 1977. The wine is fermented and raised in the same manner as the Sonoma Coast bottling in 2019, coming in at the same thirteen percent octane and delivering a refined nose of apple, clementine, almost salty soil elements, citrus blossoms, vanillin oak and a hint of acacia blossom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a fine core, superb backend mineral drive, bouncy acids and lovely balance and lift on the long and nascently complex finish. This too deserves some bottle age to allow it to really blossom completely, though it is just as tasty out of the blocks as the Sonoma Coast bottling and it is going to be difficult to keep one’s hands off of bottles down in the cellar! 2022-2035+. **93**.

**2019 Chardonnay “Central Coast”- Sandhi Wines**

The 2019 Chardonnay “Central Coast” bottling is Sandhi Wines first release of this cuvée, which hails from several vineyard sources, including Bien Nacido, Phelan Farm, Spanish Springs, Talley and McIntyre, with many of these planted to relatively old vines. The wine is barrel-fermented and raised in neutral casks and puncheons. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful blend of apple, a touch of fresh pineapple, a complex base of salty soil tones, dried flowers and just a whisper of vanillin oak from the older oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, fine mineral undertow, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex finish. This is fairly tightly-knit out of the blocks and will show more complexity with a bit of bottle age, but in a pinch, it is already pretty tasty juice. I love the backend lift here! 2022-2040. **91**.

**2018 Chardonnay “Belle Pente Vineyard”- Day Wines (Yamhill-Carlton)**

The 2018 Chardonnay “Belle Pente Vineyard” bottling from Brianne Day is a fine young wine, offering up a bright and nascently complex nose of apple, clementine, a fine base of soil tones, almond, a discreet foundation of buttery oak and an exotic touch of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and young, with a lovely core, good mineral drive and bounce, and a long, zesty and beautifully balanced finish. This wine is certainly approachable out of the blocks, but it is a puppy, and I would try to hold onto it in the cellar for a year or two and really let it blossom fully. Fine juice. 2022-2040. **92.**

**2018 Chardonnay “Eola-Amity Hills”- Bryn Mawr Vineyards (screwcap)**

The 2018 Bryn Mawr chardonnay is produced entirely from estate-grown fruit. The wine is barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in under twenty percent new oak in this vintage. It comes in at 12.6 percent alcohol and offers up a complex nose of lemon, tart pear, a good base of soil tones, a discreet touch of the lees, dried flowers and just a dollop of new oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and zesty, with good focus and grip and a long, bouncy finish. I do not know if this wine is sealed with a liner that allows oxygen ingress (as is the winery’s Willamette Valley bottling of pinot noir), but the wine is a bit reductive right now and clenched on the finish as a result. There is certainly very good intensity of flavor here, and if the wine is able to blossom properly, it will be lovely. But, I am a bit worried about its closure, as it is already showing some reductive elements that may be locking in. 2020-2030? **87.**

**2018 Chardonnay “Citrine”- Enfield Wine Company (California)**

The 2018 Chardonnay “Citrine” bottling from Enfield Wine Company is composed from fruit from four different vineyards: Rorick Heritage, Heron Lake, Haynes and Brosseau Vineyard, with the average age of the vines fully forty years of age. While I do not have any specific information on its winemaking, it seems to have seen at least some of the blend fermented or raised in cement eggs. The bouquet is bright and classy, offering up scents of apple, lemon blossoms, a touch of lavender, a fine base of soil tones, citrus peel and a bit of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven in personality, with a good core, fine focus and grip, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex and quite classy finish. This is a nicely cool fruit chardonnay at 12.9 percent octane, with plenty of personality and the structure to age very well indeed. Good juice in a nicely offbeat style that recalls early vintages of Chalone, with less new oak. 2020-2035. **91.**

**2018 Chardonnay “Seven Springs”- Evening Land (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The 2018 Chardonnay “Seven Springs” bottling from Evening Land is a lovely wine, coming in at a cool thirteen percent octane and offering up a classy bouquet of pear, delicious apple, almond, a lovely base of almost salty soil tones, citrus peel, fruit blossoms and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, zesty and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, lovely mineral drive and grip, a fine girdle of acidity and a long, focused and complex finish. This is an excellent bottle of chardonnay that is drinking nicely already, but clearly will age long and gracefully. 2020-2040. **92.**

**2018 Chardonnay “Summum” Seven Springs Estate- Evening Land (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The Summum bottling from Evening Land hails from a small parcel in the center of the Seven Springs Vineyard that is planted on pure volcanic soil. The wine is fermented and raised in new Stockinger *puncheons* for most of its *élevage*, with the last several months spent finishing in stainless steel tanks. The 2018 Summum is gently reductive on the nose when first opened, but blossoms to deliver scents of pear, passion fruit, hazelnut, iodine, stony soil tones and a nice touch of buttery new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite tightly-knit,

with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and grip, a very good girdle of acidity and a long, nascently complex finish. I would let this wine properly blossom with three or four years' worth of bottle age! 2023-2045+. **93+**.

**2018 Chardonnay “Les Enfants du Soleil”- Madson Winery (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

The chardonnay bottling from Madson Winery hails from two different vineyard sources in the Santa Cruz Mountains, PM Staiger Vineyard and Toyon Vineyard. The Staiger Vineyard vines were planted in the late 1960s on their *franc de pied* rootstock. The Toyon Vineyard overlooks Monterey Bay and is a very cool microclimate, no doubt contributing to the svelte 12.5 percent octane in the bottling. The wine is raised solely in older casks and offers up a refined bouquet of pear, apple, beeswax, a fine base of soil tones, fresh almond and a lovely touch of honeysuckle in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and nascently complex, with a good core, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long, low fat and very classy finish. I really like this style of lower octane, soil-driven chardonnay. The wine is quite approachable already, but more complexity will emerge if it is given a couple of years in the cellar to blossom. It should age very nicely. 2020-2035. **92**.

**2018 Chardonnay- Penville Wines (Santa Rita Hills)**

The 2018 Chardonnay from Michael Villa at Penville Wines was sourced from the Spear Vineyard. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and saw no new oak during its *élevage*. It is fairly ripe, coming in listed at 14.34 percent alcohol. The wine offers up a bright bouquet of pineapple, tangerine, salty soil tones, fruit blossoms and a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, sound framing acids and good length and grip on the wide open finish. The ripeness here leads to just a touch of heaviness on the backend, but the wine is not hot on the finish and will just want drinking up over the next few years, as it is already wearing its heart on its sleeve. 2020-2023. **89**.

**2018 Chardonnay “Santa Barbara County”- Presqu’Ile Winery (Santa Barbara County)**

The 2018 Santa Barbara County bottling of chardonnay from Presqu’Ile Winery is a lovely bottle, coming in at 13.2 percent octane and delivering a vibrant nose of pineapple, lemon, a fine base of soil tones, citrus blossoms and a very discreet touch of oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a good core, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex and well-balanced finish. This has not yet started to blossom and is still quite primary in personality, but more complexity will come with some bottle age. Good juice. 2020-2026. **88**.

**2018 Chardonnay “Hyland Vineyard”- Résonance Wines (McMinnville)**

The 2018 Chardonnay “Hyland Vineyard” bottling from Jacques Lardière at Résonance is a lovely young example of the vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of lemon, pear, salty soil tones, a touch of raw almond, citrus zest and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral drive and bounce, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is a fine bottle in the making, but it is still fairly tightly-knit and I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for a few years and let it blossom properly. Good juice. 2022-2040+. **91+**.

**2018 Chardonnay “Santa Rita Hills”- Sandhi Wines**

The 2018 Santa Rita Hills bottling of chardonnay from Sandhi is gently reductive when first opened, which augurs nicely for its long evolution in bottle. With a bit of coaxing, the wine opens up nicely to offer an aromatic constellation of pineapple, passion fruit, a touch of iodine, a beautiful base of soil tones, fresh almond and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and youthful, with a fine girdle of acidity, a good core, excellent mineral drive and bounce and a long, nascently complex finish. This deserves some bottle age to

properly blossom, but it will be lovely in due course. 2018 is the first vintage where all of the fruit for this bottling hails from Domaine de la Côte vineyard sources. It was fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised all in puncheons, with twenty percent new. Fine juice. 2022-2045+. **92+**.

**2018 Chardonnay “Sanford & Benedict Vineyard”- Sandhi Wines (Santa Rita Hills)**

The 2018 Sanford & Benedict bottling of chardonnay from Sandhi was also raised in twenty percent new oak puncheons for a year, with six more months of finishing time in tank prior to bottling. These are the oldest chardonnay vines planted in the Central Coast, as they went into the ground all the way back in 1971, on *franc de pied*. The wine delivers a lovely nose of pear, pineapple, a *souçon* of iodine, salty soil tones, a discreet framing of buttery oak and a lovely topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a lovely core, fine mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and a long, primary and very promising finish. This is still a puppy and will demand some time in the cellar to unfold and show all of its complexity, but it is so nicely balanced out of the blocks that it will be all too easy to drink before it really blossoms. Try to give it some time! 2024-2050. **94**.



**2017 Chardonnay “VGW”- OO Wines (Willamette Valley)**

The VGW bottling (Very Good White) is the entry level bottling of chardonnay from Chris Hermann at OO. The 2017 version was produced from fruit sourced from four different vineyards, three of them in the Eola-Amity Hills AVA, including Seven Springs Vineyard. The

wine was raised in twenty percent new oak for one year and then finished with another five months in stainless steel tank prior to bottling. The wine is gently reductive out of the blocks, auguring well for a long life in bottle, as it offers up scents of apple, pear, hazelnut, a superb base of soil tones, a touch of honeysuckle and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely reserved in personality, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil transparency, zesty acids and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is very Meursault-like in its stylistic sensibilities, with different soil signature. I would be inclined to let it see a bit of bottle age, as it is clearly built for the long haul, but it is so tasty out of the blocks that I suspect plenty of bottles will not see all that much time in the cellar. Fine, fine juice! 2020-2045. **93.**

#### **2017 Chardonnay “EGW”- OO Wines (Willamette Valley)**

The 2017 EGW cuvée (Extra Good White) from Chris Hermann is produced from some of the best casks of chardonnay from the Hyland, Anahata, Bunker Hill and Chehelam Mountain Vineyards. The wine is again raised in twenty percent new oak for a year and then given five months finishing time on its fine lees in tank. Again, there is a slightly reductive aspect to the wine that recalls young Coche-Dury, but which opens up to reveal scents of apple, passion fruit, hazelnut, butter, a touch of iodine, spring flowers, complex soil tones and a deft foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and shows enormous backend energy and lift, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral undertow, bright acids and a long, complex and utterly complete finish. This is an excellent wine, with the broader shoulders of a wine like Meursault “Poruzots”, with excellent breed and backend precision. This really should be tucked away for a handful of years in the cellar and let it start to unfurl some of its secondary layers of complexity! 2024-2050. **94.**

#### **2017 Chardonnay “Eola Springs”- OO Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The 2017 Eola Springs Vineyard Chardonnay bottling from Chris Hermann is excellent on both the nose and palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a very refined blend of pear, nectarine, toasted almond, a lovely base of almost salty soil tones, a touch of iodine, fruit blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and solid at the core, with truly stunning soil signature, a lovely girdle of acidity, excellent balance and grip and a long, youthfully complex and very, very promising finish. This is not necessarily more transparent down to its soil than either the VGW or EGW cuvées, but as those are blends, the *terroir* does not take center stage in those bottlings in the same manner as it does in this beautiful single vineyard wine, so the personality comes through even more clearly here. As is the case with the 2017 EGW bottling, the backend lift here is outstanding. 2022-2050. **94+.**

#### **2017 Chardonnay “Hyland”- OO Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The 2017 Hyland Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from Chris Hermann is a lovely young wine, offering up a gently reductive nose of lemon, apple, iodine, orange blossoms, a lovely base of soil and a suave foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is zesty, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with lovely mineral drive and cut, a fine girdle of acidity and a long, very well-balanced and complex finish. This is a young wine and really deserves three to five years in the cellar before drinking, as it is still in climbing mode. Of the 2017 single vineyard chardonnays that I have tasted from OO Wines for this report, this is one of my favorites. 2024-2050. **94.**

#### **2017 Chardonnay “Open Claim”- OO Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The Open Claim Vineyard was planted in 2012, with only the top two blocks of vines of the ten in the vineyard having been planted to chardonnay, with the rest committed to pinot noir.

Chris Hermann used fruit from Open Claim in his 2016 VGW bottling, and the 2017 is the first single vineyard bottling he has produced from here. The wine is a tad less reductive out of the blocks than some of these other OO single vineyard bottlings, delivering lovely aromatics in its blend of apple, passion fruit, a touch of orange zest, lovely, salty minerality, hazelnut and a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a good core and soil signature, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This seems likely to be one of the shorter-lived single vineyard bottlings of chardonnay from OO in the 2017 vintage, but it still has excellent backend grip and should easily cruise along for twenty years. It is already very tasty. 2020-2040. **93.**

**2017 Chardonnay “Seven Springs”- OO Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The 2017 Seven Springs Vineyard bottling of chardonnay from OO Wines is fairly reductive on the nose, as are most these other OO chardonnays, starting out life tightly-knit and hopefully protecting the wine for long aging in the bottle. With a bit of swirling it opens up nicely to deliver a complex bouquet of apple, pear, iodine, hazelnut, a fine base of soil tones and a nice touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely mineral drive and grip, fine focus and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a lovely wine, but it does not quite show the same backend energy as the Eola Springs Vineyard bottling in 2017. 2020-2040. **93.**

**2017 Chardonnay “Freya Hermann Cuvée”- OO Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The Freya Hermann Cuvée of chardonnay from OO is handled a bit differently in the cellars than most of the others in their lineup. Whereas most wines spend one year in Burgundy casks and then are raked into stainless steel for another six months of finishing *élevage*, the Freya Hermann Cuvée is raised in five hundred liter puncheons for twenty-three months prior to bottling, with no time in tank. The 2017 version comes in at fourteen percent octane and is pretty reductive out of the blocks, so if you are tempted to open one early on, definitely give it some time in decanter to blossom. With air, the wine does open up nicely to deliver a constellation of apple, passion fruit, iodine, hazelnuts, a lovely base of salty soil tones and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a superb core, excellent soil signature and bounce, fine focus and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. There is certainly a stylistic nod to the wines of Coche-Dury in all of Chris Hermann’s chardonnays that I tasted, but this is the most Coche-like of the cuvées that I had the pleasure to try from the 2017 vintage. It is a lovely wine that will age long and gracefully, but remember, it demands half an hour in decanter if one is inclined to drink it now! 2023-2045. **95.**

**2017 Chardonnay- Domaine Anderson (Anderson Valley)**

The 2017 Chardonnay from Darrin Low at Domaine Anderson is a lovely bottle. The wine is raised in about twenty-five percent new oak, comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a bright and zesty nose of apple, pear, a fine base of soil tones, raw almond, dried flowers and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, focused and full-bodied, with a good core of fruit, a nice foundation of soil tones, zesty acids and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex finish. Even at three years of age, this is still a young wine and more complexity is certain to unfold with a bit more bottle age. This is the first wines I have tasted from Domaine Anderson and I am quite impressed with their restrained and classy style. 2020-2032. **90+.**

**2017 Chardonnay “Mariah Vineyard”- Bee Hunter (Mendocino Ridge) screwcap**

The 2017 Chardonnay “Mariah Vineyard” from Bee Hunter is fermented and raised in three year-old *foudre* and never sees any new oak during its nine months of *élevage*. The wine is

fermented with indigenous yeasts and left on its fine lees during its nine months in *foudre*. The 2017 version comes in at 14.1 percent octane and offers up a superb bouquet of apple, nectarine, a lovely base of Mendocino soil tones, a bit of apple pie spices, incipient notes of honeycomb and just a whisper of vanillin oak (from its used *foudres*). On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and zesty, with a lovely core and soil signature, fine focus and bounce and a long, classy finish. As this too is closed with a screwcap, there is a bit of reductive bitterness on the backend that has to be waited out by putting the wine in decanter for twenty minutes or so, but it cleans up nicely with air. As is the case with the Bee Hunter Pinot Gris, it is borderline criminal to be putting a chardonnay this good under screwcap. 2020-2028. **91.**

**2017 Chardonnay “Cuvée Arthur”- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)**

Véronique Drouhin’s Cuvée Arthur has long been one of my favorite chardonnay bottlings in all of Oregon and the 2017 vintage is a stellar example of this fine wine. The wine comes in at 13.9 percent octane and wafts from the glass in an utterly refined aromatic constellation of apple, pear, lemon, chalky soil tones, fresh almond, beeswax, spring flowers and a discreet touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very elegant in profile, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, zesty acids and a long, beautifully balanced and complex finish. This is classy juice. 2020-2040+. **93.**

**2017 Chardonnay “Five Faces”- Fullerton Wines (Willamette Valley) screwcap**

The 2017 Five Faces Chardonnay from the Fullerton family is nicely light on its feet, having been picked to come in at 12.5 percent octane and only seeing ten percent new oak during its *élevage*. The nose is bright and now nicely wide open, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, fresh almond, salty soil tones, gently musky floral tones redolent of acacia blossoms and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a good core, nice mineral drive and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is a svelte and stylish middleweight (and really deserves to be sealed under a natural cork in coming vintages, as this is far too serious a wine for a screwcap!) 2020-2028. **91+**.

**2017 Chardonnay “Santa Maria Valley”- Presqu’Ile Winery (Santa Maria Valley)**

The 2017 Santa Maria Valley bottling of chardonnay from Presqu’Ile is composed of a fifty-fifty blend of fruit from the Presqu’Ile and Bien Nacido Vineyards. It comes in at 12.8 percent alcohol and was raised almost entirely in used barrels (one new cask in the rotation, comprising 2.5 percent new oak!) for eleven months, prior to racking to tank for six months of finishing *elevage*. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pineapple, apple, a touch of orange peel, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite generous today, with a good core, moderate complexity, sound framing acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is drinking at its peak. 2020-2024. **89.**

**2017 Chardonnay- Ravines Wine Cellars (Finger Lakes)**

The 2017 Chardonnay from Ravines Wine Cellars comes in at a cool and classy 12.5 percent octane and offers up a fine nose of apple, peach, hazelnut, a fine base of soil tones and just a whisper of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, fine soil undertow, lovely acidity and grip and a long, beautifully balanced finish. At three years of age this wine is just starting to come into its apogee and still has plenty of life ahead of it. The style reminds me quite a bit of a top Mâconnais wine with a different soil signature. Good juice and a fine value at \$20 per bottle! 2020-2030. **89+**.

### 2017 Chardonnay- Rose Rock (Famille Drouhin) Eola-Amity Hills

The 2017 Rose Rock Chardonnay is a fine young bottle in the making, with the cooler microclimate of this section of the Willamette Valley providing a lovely girdle of acidity on which the wine will age. The bouquet offers up a youthfully complex nose of pear, a touch of fresh pineapple, lovely soil tones, acacia blossoms, lemon zest and a refined foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, zesty and full-bodied, with a fine core, lovey mineral drive and cut, vibrant acids and a long, nascently complex finish. Though the *terroirs* are not similar, this shares an aesthetic sensibility with the Drouhins' Beaune "Clos des Mouches" Blanc and should be a gorgeous bottle with a few years in the cellar. 2022-2045+. **92+**.



### 2016 Chardonnay "VGW"- OO Wines (Willamette Valley)

The 2016 Chardonnay "VGW" from OO Wines is really starting to open up nicely at four years of age and shows beautifully where the 2017 version will be headed with a bit more bottle age. The bouquet is still a touch reductive (and reminiscent of the wines of Coche-Dury in that sense), but promptly blossoms to offer notes of pear, passion fruit, a hint of iodine, almond, a lovely base of soil tones, apple blossoms and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and nicely racy, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and a long, beautifully balanced and very classy finish. This is fine, fine juice. 2020-2040. **93+**.

### **2016 Chardonnay “The Drawing Board”- Wenzlau Vineyard (Santa Rita Hills)**

The 2016 Chardonnay “The Drawing Board” from Wenzlau Vineyard was raised in ten percent new oak and went through full malo. It is nicely cool in personality, coming in listed at 12.8 percent octane and offering up a vibrant and classy nose of apple, a touch of pineapple, salty soil tones, white flowers and just a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a good core of fruit, lovely acidity and grip and very nice balance on the long and zesty finish. This is not overly complex, but it compensates that by hitting all of its more limited range of notes flawlessly. 2020-2027. **89.**

### ***Rosé***

#### **2019 Rosé of Grenache- Penville Wines (Santa Ynez)**

The 2019 Rosé of Grenache from Penville Wines is fermented and raised in a combination of stainless steel tank, older cask and used oak puncheons. The wine is nicely ripe, tipping the scales at just over 13.6 percent and offering up a lovely, very pale salmon color. The bouquet is a pretty blend of tangerine, melon, salty soil tones, citrus zest and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and fairly powerful in personality, with a good core, solid framing acids and good length and grip on the finish. 2020-2023. **88.**

#### **2019 Three Otters Pinot Rosé- Fullerton Wines (Willamette Valley) screwcap**

The 2019 Three Otters Pinot Rosé from Fullerton Wines is composed of a unique blend of ninety percent pinot gris and ten percent pinot noir. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in a fifty-fifty combination of stainless steel tanks and older casks. It is a lovely salmon color and offers up a very pretty bouquet of strawberries, watermelon, pretty spice tones, a nice dollop of soil and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and nicely vinous in style, with a good core, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the zesty finish. This is quite good rosé. 2020-2024. **88.**

### ***Off the Beaten Path Red Wines and Blends***

#### **2019 Gamay Noir- Terrassen Wine Cellars (Finger Lakes)**

The 2019 Gamay Noir from Terrassen Wine Cellars comes in at a svelte twelve percent octane. The grapes were foot-trodden and fermented in a semi-carbonic manner, prior to aging in old Burgundy casks for eight months. The wine offers up a vibrant and red fruity bouquet of strawberries, cranberries, white pepper, fresh herbs, roses and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and transparent, with lovely intensity of flavor, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the well-balanced and impressively long finish. This is light on its feet and fairly delicate in profile, but hardly short on personality or grip! Good juice. 2020-2035. **88+.**

#### **2019 Blau-Ökör- Vinous Obscura (Golden Cluster) Willamette Valley**

The 2019 Blau-Ökör from Vinous Obscura is made from a blend of traditional Hungarian red wine grapes, which are co-fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in neutral casks. The wine comes in listed at 9.28 percent octane (!) and is quite dark in color, offering up scents of dark berries, a bit of road tar, espresso, botanicals and a gently autumnal base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, tangy and medium-bodied, with good intensity of flavor and grip, modest tannin and a long, impressively complex finish. Needless to say, this is beautifully light on its feet. There is not a lot of meat on the bones here, but I really like this wine. 2020-2030. **90.**

### **2019 Danke Gerhardt Alleweldt- Vinous Obscura (Golden Cluster) Willamette Valley**

The 2019 Danke Gerhardt Alleweldt from Vinous Obscura is composed of a blend of seventy percent Garanoir and thirty percent Regent grapes (two hybrids developed in the 1970s in Germany and Switzerland respectively). Gerhardt Alleweldt was the researcher who developed the Garanoir grape. The wine is nicely dark and color, yet only ten percent alcohol, delivering a fine bouquet of dark berries, woodsmoke, a bit of gamebird, herb tones, dark soil and a bit of cigar ash in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and tangy, with a whisper of tannin, good focus and grip and a long, intensely flavored finish. This is quite tasty and a whole new world to me. 2020-2028. **89.**

### **2018 Pretty Horses- Enfield Wine Company (California)**

The Pretty Horses bottlings from Enfield Wine Company is composed of a blend of seventy-five percent tempranillo, ten percent each of grenache and pinot noir and five percent graciano, with all of these grapes hailing from vineyards in the foothills of the Sierras. The 2018 comes in at 13.2 percent octane and offers up red fruity nose of cherries, raspberries, nice spice tones, cedar and a dollop of fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and wide open in personality, with a good core, moderate tannins and pretty good length and grip on the finish. This is not the most focused wine, but it is juicy and tasty. I am not really sure the pinot noir adds all that much to the blend, which is otherwise made from grapes one would find in many a Rioja bottling. 2020-2030. **88.**

### **2018 Sangiovese “Reward Ranch”- Kendric Vineyards (Shenandoah Valley)**

I like Stewart Johnson’s Sangiovese better and better with each passing vintage. I am sure if I mentioned this to him, he would just modestly say that the vines are getting older (they were planted in 1995), but I have the sense that Stewart is really starting to know what he wants to do with this bottling. The 2018 is really lovely, coming in at 13.7 percent octane and offering up a very refined bouquet of cherries, a touch of orange peel, pomegranate, thyme, oregano, a touch of cedar and a superb base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tangy, with a superb core of sappy fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. There is a lovely interplay here of sweet red fruit and slightly bitter elements on the backend that one finds in so many classic Italian wines, but so seldom finds in California Sangiovese. It will be approachable when it is released early next year, but it is built to age gracefully and I am going to put my bottles away for at least five years and see where this wine takes me! This is a beautiful wine and a stunning bargain, as it sells for under \$35 a bottle. 2021-2050. **93.**

### **2018 Sagrantino “Sacris”- Vinous Obscura (Golden Cluster) Columbia Gorge**

The 2018 Sagrantino “Sacris” from Golden Cluster is the first ever bottling of this Italian variety in the history of Oregon. It was aged in a mix of older French and Hungarian oak casks for twenty months prior to bottling, without fining or filtration. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite expressive out of the blocks, offering up scents of dark berries, black cherries, a bit of road tar, bonfire, fresh herb tones and a touch of Bandol-like tree bark. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, robust and chewy, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, firm tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This will need some bottle age to let its tannins soften up a bit, but it has the balance and depth to age long and gracefully and will be a fine drink in due course. 2028-2060. **91+.**



### ***Syrah and Grenache***

#### **2018 Syrah “For Bruce”- Dionystic (Golden Cluster) Willamette Valley**

The 2018 Syrah “For Bruce” includes five percent Viognier in the blend, with the two grapes co-fermented. The wine is named for a long-time vineyard manager in Oregon, Bruce Biehl, who was pushing vineyard owners to see beyond pinot noir when planting new vineyards back in the 1990s. These grapes hail from one of those vineyards on the northern fringe of the Willamette Valley, where the owner took Bruce’s advice. The wine is co-fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in older casks for eight months, prior to bottling unfiltered and unfiltered. It comes in at 14.1 percent octane in 2018 and offers up a fine, youthful nose of cassis, black olive, pepper, grilled meats, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with excellent focus and grip, tangy acids, a fine core of fruit and very good soil signature on the long, ripely tannic and very promising finish. This is an excellent bottle of young syrah- just add a modicum of patience to the recipe and let it blossom properly with bottle age! 2028-2060. 92+.

#### **2018 Syrah “Haynes Vineyard”- Enfield Wine Company (Napa Valley)**

The 2018 Syrah “Haynes Vineyard” bottling from Enfield Wine Company comes in at a cool thirteen percent alcohol, as this is one of the coolest vineyard sites in Napa. The topsoils are composed of an alluvial deposit of pebbly soil, over a volcanic layer, so acidity is never an issue here. The wine offers up a youthful bouquet of cassis, pepper, black olive, bonfire, smoked meats and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and chewy, with a

good core, lovely mineral drive, bright acids and a long, nascently complex and well-balanced finish. This is a very good bottle of syrah for the cellar, as it will need some bottle age to soften up properly, but it has very good potential. It is a fascinating expression of syrah, with a classic whole cluster syrah personality tied to a very good signature of soil, but the soil tones recall many a great Napa cabernet from yesteryear! This will not be a powerful example of syrah when it is ready to drink, but it is long on both personality and complexity and should be a lovely drink in due course. 2026-2050. **90.**

**2018 Syrah “Petaluma Gap”- Kendric Vineyards (Marin County)**

The Kendric Vineyards bottling of syrah in 2018 comes in at a svelte 12.5 percent octane and offers up beautiful precision on both the nose and palate. Like a good Côte-Rôtie, there is just a trace amount of viognier in this blend, which offers up a deep and nascently complex nose of black raspberry, pepper, smoked meats, lovely spice tones, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke and just a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit and soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, beautifully balanced and very classy finish. This deserves some bottle age to blossom properly, but it is going to be excellent in due course! It is currently selling on the winery’s website for \$280 a case of twelve bottles, making it one of the best bargains to be found in the realm of California red wine! Make sure you save me one. 2028-2055. **92+.**

**2017 A Peridot Afternoon- Day Wines (Yamhill Carlton)**

The fruit for this bottling hails from the Deux Vert Vineyard in Yamhill Carlton. It is a blend of ninety percent syrah and ten percent viognier, with the two varieties co-fermented and aged in neutral oak casks and *demi-muids*. Brianne Day made this wine for her son, Viggo, who was born just before harvest in this year and actually participated in the foot trodding of the grapes, as he was happily ensconced in his Ergo-Baby carrier while mom crushed the grapes beneath both of them. The syrah included twenty-five percent whole clusters, the wine was fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged two and a half years prior to bottling. It offers up a deep and youthfully complex nose of dark berries, pepper, smoked meats, a nice touch of stems, a fine base of soil, black olive and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a good core, superb soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. Brianne’s intention was to craft a wine that would age long enough for Viggo to enjoy when he was a young man, and there is no doubt that this lovely wine will age for many decades and meet that aspiration. It is excellent, with the weight of a Gonon Saint-Joseph and the exquisite balance to outlast time itself. 2027-2065. **92+.**

**2016 Syrah “Broken Leg Vineyard”- Bee Hunter (Anderson Valley)**

The 2016 Broken Leg Vineyard cuvée from Bee Hunter is an excellent bottle of syrah. The wine delivers a superb aromatic constellation of cassis, pepper, tapenade, roasted meats, a nice touch of *garrigue*, a fine base of dark soil tones, woodsmoke and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow, ripe tannins and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. Though this has a fair bit of tannin, they are quite buried in the fruit and the wine is already really pretty tasty. It is not as tightly-knit as some top flight American syrahs are at this young age, so it is certainly not a crime to open a bottle or two now, but this wine should age very nicely and will be even better five to ten years down the road. It comes in at fourteen percent octane in 2016. 2020-2045+. **91.**

### **2016 Grenache- Penville Wine (Ballard Canyon)**

Penville Wine is a side project run by Michael Villas of Maison d'Amis cabernet fame, where Rhône varieties are the focus from fruit sourced in the Santa Ynez Valley. The 2016 Grenache is produced from grapes grown on the Stolpman Vineyards. The wine includes thirty percent whole clusters and is raised in a combination of a used *puncheon*, a twelve hundred liter *foudre* and a cement vat, prior to bottling. The 2016 comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a pretty nose of raspberries, pepper, a wide array of spice tones, roasted meats, bonfire and a fine base of limestone soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely transparent, with a good core, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is nicely light on its feet and very tasty. 2023-2050. **89+**.

### **2016 Grenache “Chingón”- Penville Wine (Ballard Canyon)**

The Chingón bottling of grenache from the Stolpman Vineyards is made with one hundred percent whole clusters, was fermented in cement vat and raised entirely in neutral puncheons, rather than the various vessels of the regular bottling. The wine shares the same lovely red fruit and spice tones of the regular cuvée, with a heightened sense of spiciness from the additional whole clusters, as it wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of raspberries, cherries, cinnamon, cardamom, chalky soil tones, gamebird woodsmoke and orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and again, beautifully transparent, with a lovely core, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. Good juice in the making. 2025-2050. **91**.

### **2016 Syrah- Penville Wine (Ballard Canyon)**

The 2016 Syrah from Michael Villa at Penville is also sourced from the Stolpman Vineyards. The wine included ten percent whole clusters in this vintage, was fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised entirely in older oak. The wine delivers a fine aromatic constellation of cassis, black raspberries, black olive, pepper, grilled meats, a beautiful base of limestone soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with excellent grip and mineral drive, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This has a structural intensity and backend energy that towers above the very tasty grenache bottlings from Penville. Superb juice! 2025-2060. **93+**.

### **2015 Grenache- Penville Wine (Ballard Canyon)**

The 2015 Penville Grenache was also sourced from the Stolpman Vineyards in Ballard Canyon, but this is quite a bit lower in octane than the 2016 version, as this wine comes in listed at 12.67 percent alcohol. It shares the same light color as the 2016 and offers up a bright bouquet of red currants, blood orange, *garrigue*, a bit of pepper, gentle smokiness, a nice touch of sweet stems and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, just a touch of natural wine volatility, moderate tannins and a long, bouncy finish. This may be a touch too lean in style for some fanciers of grenache, as it is really done in the style of a light Beaujolais, but it has plenty of personality for the intrepid who are not deterred by a more middleweight interpretation of this varietal. 2022-2045. **88**.

### **2011 Syrah “Alder Springs Vineyard”- Alesia (Rhys Vineyards) Mendocino County**

The 2011 Alder Springs Vineyard bottling of Syrah from Alesia is aging very gracefully. The wine comes in listed at a quite civilized 13.2 percent octane and offers up today a very good nose of cassis, smoked meats, a good base of soil tones, pepper, a touch of chocolate, hickory smoke and a fine blend of spices and more resinous notes like rosemary in the upper register. On

the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and resolving beautifully, with a nice touch of plushness on the attack, a lovely core of fruit, good soil undertow, modest tannins and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is not as focused as the Syrah bottlings from the winery's own vineyards, but it is a very good wine in its own right and is starting to really drink well as it closes in on its tenth birthday. 2020-2045. **90.**



*The Momtazi Vineyard in the McMinnville AVA of the Willamette Valley.*

### ***Pinot Noir***

#### **2019 Pinot Noir “Clos Pepe Vineyard Est”- Beau Marchais (Santa Rita Hills)**

Beau Marchais is a brand new joint venture between Adam Lee of Clarice Wine Company and the consulting winemaker Philippe Cambie, who works with several top estates in the southern Rhône Valley and had always dreamed of trying his hand at pinot noir. These three different bottlings are all very well-made, but they are plenty ripe in personality, so keep in mind that they will not be to everyone's tastes. I tried to be as understanding of their stylistic paradigm as I could be; for those who like bigger, riper wines, my scores will seem unduly conservative. The Beau Marchais 2019 Clos Pepe Vineyard Est bottling tips the scales at 15.1 percent octane, but shows impressive aromatic detail for this level of ripeness, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, black raspberries, woodsmoke, a nice array of spices, fruitcake and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and black fruity, with a good core of fruit, buried tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and slightly warm finish. This is a bit more reserved

out of the blocks than the West bottling from this vineyard, and at the present time, shows its alcohol a touch more on the backend. 2027-2055. **89.**

**2019 Pinot Noir “Clos Pepe Vineyard Ouest”- Beau Marchais (Santa Rita Hills)**

As the Clos Pepe Vineyard runs east-west, there are significant differences between sections of the vineyard and Adam and Philippe choose to bottle these two sections on their own for this reason. The 2019 Clos Pepe Ouest cuvée comes in a ripe 15.1 percent alcohol and offers up a bouquet of black raspberries, black cherries, spit-roasted venison, dried eucalyptus, woodsmoke, raw cocoa and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a touch warm on the backend, with a good core of fruit, impressive focus and grip, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. I am quite surprised at how well-balanced this wine is, given its octane, and I do not see any reason why it will not age quite well. This is quite well-made, but it is not a classic example of pinot noir at 15.1 percent! 2025-2055. **90+.**

**2019 Pinot Noir “Soberanes Vineyard”- Beau Marchais (Santa Lucia Highlands)**

The 2019 Beau Marchais Soberanes Vineyard bottling of pinot noir is a pretty ripe customer, again coming in tipping the scales listed at 15.1 percent octane. The wine shows shadings of Monsieur Cambie’s native region in its aromatic blend of baked raspberries, fruitcake, woodsmoke, lovely spice tones, a bit of saddle leather, gentle meatiness and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively well-balanced for its octane, with a good core of fruit, a bit of chewy tannin and a long, primary and gently warm finish. This really carries its alcohol remarkably well. It is still a very young wine and will need some bottle age before it blossoms. Think of it as a Monterey pinot noir with Châteauneuf du Pape sensibilities; it will be very interesting to follow this wine in the cellar and see how it blossoms. 2027-2055. **88-90.**

**2019 Pinot Noir “Classique”- Forge Cellars (Seneca Lake)**

The Pinot Noir “Classique” bottling from Louis Barruol and Richard Rainey is fermented with indigenous yeasts in oak vats and the 2019 comes in at 12.5 percent octane. It offers up a bright and nascently complex nose of cherries, pomegranate, a fine base of soil tones, a hint of mustard seed, woodsmoke and a nice touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a nice core of red fruit, good soil signature and grip, moderate tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. This is nicely structured and will need a few years in the cellar to blossom, but will be a good bottle in due course. 2025-2045. **87.**

**2019 Pinot Noir “Leidenfrost”- Forge Cellars (Seneca Lake)**

The Leidenfrost Vineyard is a small vineyard planted to both riesling and pinot noir, with the vines having gone into the ground in the mid-1990s and now coming into a very good age. The 2019 Leidenfrost pinot noir from Forge Cellars also tips the scales at a svelte 12.5 percent alcohol and delivers a lovely, more black fruity aromatic constellation in its mix of dark berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, a bit of roasted game, espresso, some youthful savory notes from the whole cluster and a fine base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripely tannic, with a fine core and soil signature, very good balance and grip and a long, complex and still youthful and tangy finish. This too will demand some bottle age before it blossoms, but it has fine constituent components and will be a fine drink once it has developed with some cellaring. 2027-2050. **89.**

**2019 Pinot Noir “Canary Hill Vineyard”- Kelley Fox Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)**

This is the first I have seen of a Canary Hill Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Kelley Fox and it is simply beautiful. The vineyard is owned by Ken Wright, with the parcel that Kelley purchases grapes from having been planted in 1999. The 2019 Canary Hill bottling comes in at a

cool 12.5 percent octane and delivers a beautifully refined, black fruity nose of dark berries, cassis, a complex array of gentle herb tones that recall bay leaf, cumin and thyme, coffee bean, dark soil tones and a topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, vibrant and intensely flavored, with a lovely core of fruit, superb transparency and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is so effortless and light on its feet, while still showing off outstanding depth and backend energy. 2029-2080. **93.**

**2019 Pinot Noir “Carter Vineyard”- Kelley Fox Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The Carter Vineyard is another new (to me) bottling of pinot noir from Kelley Fox. This vineyard is also owned by Ken Wright, with the first vines having been planted here in 1983, which include the parcel of Wädesnwil clones on *francs de pied* from which this wine is crafted. The wine is just a touch riper than the Canary Hill, reaching an even thirteen percent and offering up a vibrant bouquet of cherries, red plums, a gorgeous base of soil tones, clove, gamebird, fresh thyme, a touch of sweet stems and a discreet foundation of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and soil-driven, with a lovely core, fine-grained tannins and beautiful balance and grip on the long, complex and very promising finish. Fine juice. 2030-2080. **93+.**

**2019 Pinot Noir “Maresh Vineyard”- Kelley Fox Wines (Dundee Hills)**

The vines in the Maresh turned fifty in 2020, so that is at least one good thing that has come out of this ill-fated year. However, they were doing just fine at age forty-nine, to hear this lovely wine tell the story! Kelley Fox’s 2018 Maresh Vineyard bottling is notably light and transparent in color this year (like a liquid ruby in the glass), coming in at the vintage’s even-keeled 12.5 percent and delivering an equally beautiful red fruity blend of strawberries, cherries, blood orange, a nice youthful touch of sweet stems, a dollop of wild thyme, stunningly complex soil tones, rose petal and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and defined by its beautiful soil, with a touch of sappiness to the red fruit at the core, tangy acids, buried tannins and outstanding mineral drive and grip on the long, tangy and very complex finish. This is breathtakingly beautiful young pinot noir. 2030-2080+. **95.**

**2019 Pinot Noir “Maresh Vineyard” Royal Ann Block- Kelley Fox Wines (Dundee Hills)**

The 2019 Royal Ann Block pinot noir from Maresh Vineyard is just a shade deeper-hued than the Maresh Vineyard bottling this year, but it shares that same fire brilliance to the color in the glass. The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of cherries, cherry blossoms, a hint of red plum, gamebird, a very complex base of soil, gentle notes of cardamom, fresh nutmeg and mustard seed and a very discreet dollop of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and a tad more reserved in personality than the straight Maresh Vineyard cuvée, with a beautiful core of red fruit, excellent transparency and bounce, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This will want just a couple more years in the cellar to fully blossom than the Maresh, but will be dazzling when it is ready to drink. 2032-2080+. **95.**

**2019 Pinot Noir “Maresh Vineyard” Star-of-Bethlehem Flower Block- Kelley Fox Wines**

The Star-of-Bethlehem Flower Block in the Maresh has become one of my favorite bottlings of pinot noir in all the US, and the 2019 version is everything one would expect in the synthesis of a very special *terroir* and a great vintage, brought together under the thoughtful trusteeship of Kelley Fox. The nose delivers an elegant and perfumed blend of strawberries, cherries, a hint of sweet beetroot, cloves, mustard seed, turmeric, a refined base of soil tones, wild flowers and cedar. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and transparent, with great intensity of flavor, a lovely core, buried tannins and a long, bouncy and very complex finish. This seems a touch more like the straight Maresh in structure this year, as compared to the slightly more reticent Royal Ann pinot and will only need about a decade to really blossom into

completeness. It is a wine of total, delicate honesty and a rare bird. Tuck it away and watch it take flight. 2030-2080+. **96.**

**2019 Pinot Noir “Sonoma Coast”- Kutch Wines**

The 2019 Sonoma Coast cuvée of pinot noir from Jamie Kutch includes seventy-five percent whole clusters this year and was raised entirely in used casks. The bouquet is bright, precise and classy, wafting from the glass in a blend of cherries, pomegranate, a touch of blood orange, woodsmoke, lovely spice tones, a very refined base of soil tones and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with excellent mid-palate depth and soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is a beautiful bottle in the making, but it is fairly structured out of the blocks for this bottling and will want some quiet time in the cellar before it starts to hit on all cylinders. Its potential is outstanding. 2026-2065. **92.**

**2019 Pinot Noir “Bohan Vineyard”- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)**

Most of the Bohan Vineyard’s pinot noir vines were planted in 1972, so there are plenty of nice old vines here these days. Like the other 2019 Kutch Wines pinots, this included seventy-five percent whole clusters this year and saw no new wood. It comes in listed at an even thirteen percent octane and offers up a superb bouquet of red and black cherries, beetroot, raw cocoa, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of mustard seed, lovely spice elements from the whole clusters and a topnote of wild flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with lovely sappiness at the core, excellent focus and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This has plenty of seamless structure and will demand some cellaring, but its eventual excellence is self-evident and all that is required is some patience to let it soften up and start singing on the palate. 2029-2075+. **94+.**

**2019 Pinot Noir “Bohan Graveyard Block”- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)**

The Graveyard Block in Bohan Vineyard is a bit younger vines than some sections of this vineyard, as this parcel was planted in 1988. The soil here is different as well, as this block is sandstone, where most of the vineyard is on Goldridge soils. Interestingly, Jamie Kutch decided to completely de-stem this wine in 2019, though it was treated the same as the other Kutch pinots in all other respects, with indigenous yeast fermentation and aging in used barrels. The 2019 Graveyard offers up a more black fruity nose than the straight Bohan bottling, delivering scents of black cherries, dark berries, bonfire, spiced meats, dark soil tones, espresso, balsam bough, a hint of dried eucalyptus and a gentle framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a great core of black fruit, superb soil signature and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a very, very long, tangy and very complex finish. I love the backend lift here. Usually I am a whole cluster guy, but this wine is stunning in its potential beauty! 2030-2080. **95+.**

**2019 Pinot Noir “Falstaff Vineyard”- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)**

The 2019 Falstaff Vineyard pinot noir is another stellar young wine. This too is seventy-five percent whole clusters in this vintage and comes in at an even thirteen percent octane. The bouquet is pure, precise and nicely sappy, jumping from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, pomegranate, gamebird, a complex base of soil, espresso, sweet stem tones, lavender, a touch of eucalyptus, woodsmoke and a dollop of cedar. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and focused, with a great core of fruit, superb mineral drive and backend lift, fine-grained tannins and an endless, tangy and very complex finish. This is brilliant! 2029-2080. **95+.**

**2019 Pinot Noir “McDougall Ranch”- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)**

The 2019 McDougall Ranch bottling of pinot noir from Jamie Kutch is also excellent in quality. Its cellar stats are similar to the other wines here this year, with seventy-five percent

whole clusters and thirteen percent alcohol. The youthful nose offers up a lovely constellation of cherries, beetroot, pomegranate, *pigeon*, a fine base of dark soil, roses, black tea, sweet stem tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and potentially sappy at the core, with fine soil signature, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids and beautiful length and grip on the complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is just a touch more structurally accessible out of the blocks than these other 2019s from Jamie Kutch, but it too is built for the long haul and it would be a crime to open a bottle before its tenth birthday. Fine juice. 2029-2075. **94.**

**2019 Pinot Noir “Mindego Ridge Vineyard”- Kutch Wines (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

2019 is the first vintage produced by Jamie Kutch of pinot noir from the Mindego Ridge Vineyard. This vineyard lies up in the Santa Cruz Mountains, not far from Kevin Harvey’s Horseshoe and Alpine Vineyards. The vines were planted here in 2009. Jamie’s bottling comes in at 12.5 percent octane, included seventy-five percent whole clusters and was raised entirely in older barrels. The bouquet is youthful and lovely, offering up a nicely black fruity blend of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, espresso, a fine base of stony minerality, sweet stem tones, balsam bough and a hint of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a good core, great backend mineral drive, fine-grained tannins and a very, very long, tangy and still quite primary finish. There is plenty of complexity here, but this is a young and fairly tightly-knit wine out of the blocks and it will demand bottle age before it starts to drink with generosity. Once it blossoms, it is going to be flat out stunning! 2030-2075+. **94+.**



### **2018 Pinot Noir “Anderson Valley”- Bravium Wines**

Derek Rohlf's 2018 Anderson Valley pinot noir comes in at 13.2 percent octane and is nicely light on its feet, though still properly structured out of the blocks and hoping for a bit of time alone in the cellar to blossom more fully. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined mix of bitter cherry, pomegranate, woodsmoke, a bit of Mendocino herb tones, a good base of soil and a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely deep at the core, with well-measured tannins, good balance and grip and a long, youthfully complex finish. This is certainly approachable today, but it is still a puppy and it will be a more complete glass of pinot with a few years' worth of bottle age. 2024-2050+. **91.**

### **2018 Pinot Noir “Willamette Valley”- Bryn Mawr Vineyards (screwcap)**

Bryn Mawr's 2018 Willamette Valley bottling of pinot noir is primarily from vineyards in the Eola-Amity Hills AVA (seventy-seven percent of the cuvée), with the rest hailing from a vineyard in the Van Duzer Corridor, so these are cooler climate parcels. The 2018 comes in at 14.1 percent octane, was raised in twenty-five percent new cask and given an *elevage* of nineteen months prior to bottling. The wine offers up a pretty nose of black cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones, a good base of soil and a nice framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core and soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, youthful and well-balanced finish. This wine is sealed under a screwcap liner that allows some oxygen ingress, so as to ward off permanent reduction issues down the road. It was still a touch reductive when I opened the bottle, showing some reductive “herbal” elements, but this dissipated with some extended aeration. But, I wonder how the controlled oxygen ingress of the liner is going to affect the long-term aging of the wine, and it seems to me that it would simply be more logical to just bottle the wine under a natural or agglomerated cork, rather than mess around with oxygen ingress with the screwcap liner. I really like the raw materials here, but am not really sure when to recommend drinking the wine, as the tannins do need a bit of bottle age to soften up. But, with its closure, how will that accelerate the aging curve of the wine? My gut instincts would be to tuck it away in the cellar for two years and see where it is in its evolution (under natural cork I would have said five years down the road would be a good place to start drinking it), and then adjust its cellaring regiment from there, depending on where it has moved to under its closure. This is quite good pinot noir unnecessarily complicated by its closure of choice. 2022-2035+? **89+.**

### **2018 Pinot Noir “Bloom’s Field”- Domaine de la Côte (Santa Rita Hills)**

The 2018 vintage of Bloom's Field pinot noir from Domaine de la Côte is a lovely young wine in the making, offering up a quite black fruity bouquet this year of dark berries, bitter chocolate, some weedy notes from the whole clusters, bonfire, dark soil tones and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a lovely core of sappy black fruit, very good soil signature and grip, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a long, vibrant and still quite primary finish. This needs some time to let its secondary layer of complexity unfold. 2027-2060. **92+.**

### **2018 Pinot Noir “La Côte”- Domaine de la Côte (Santa Rita Hills)**

The 2018 La Côte” bottling from Domaine de la Côte is another fine bottle of pinot noir in the making. Like the 2018 Bloom's Field, this is a touch riper than in some vintages, coming in at 13.5 percent octane, but offering up the estate's signature purity and transparency down to the soil. The nose jumps from the glass in a youthful blend of black cherries, fresh herb tones, espresso, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke, gamebird, incipient notes of beetroot and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and sappy at the core, with

fine soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, vibrant and beautifully balanced finish. This will be very velvety when it is ready to drink and a lovely bottle. 2028-2060. **94.**

**2018 Pinot Noir “Johan Vineyard”- Day Wines (Van Duzer Corridor)**

I love the quality of the fruit that hails from the biodynamically farmed Johan Vineyard and Brianne Day always maximizes its potential. This bottling generally includes thirty percent whole clusters, is always fermented with indigenous yeasts, aged in fifteen percent new oak and bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Brianne’s 2017 Johan Vineyard bottling comes in at 13.6 percent octane and offers up a refined, perfumed and youthful bouquet of red plums, strawberries, a touch of beetroot, violets, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, almond, gentle spice tones and a suave touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with tangy acids, lovely focus and grip, a pure core of red fruit and a long, ripely tannic and soil-driven finish. This is a superb bottle in the making, but like all of the pinot noirs from the cooler Johan Vineyard, it starts out life tightly-knit and will want a bit of bottle age before it starts to offer up its charms. 2028-2060. **93.**

**2018 Pinot Noir “Momtazi Vineyard”- Day Wines (McMinnville)**

The 2018 Momtazi Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Brianne Day is a fine example of this superb vineyard. The bouquet is ripe and vibrant, offering up that signature black fruity blend of black raspberries, black cherries, a bit of smoked meats, black minerality, woodsmoke, chicory, a lovely array of spice tones and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and youthful, with a full-bodied format, lovely core of fruit, superb mineral drive, ripe tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. 2018 is a ripe and fairly powerful vintage, so I would plan to bury this excellent bottle of pinot in the cellar for at least the next seven or eight years and really let it start to blossom properly. 2027-2060. **92+.**

**2018 Pinot Noir “Heron Lake Vineyard”- Enfield Wine Company (Wild Horse Valley)**

The 2018 Pinot Noir “Heron Lake Vineyard” cuvée from Enfield Wine hails from a vineyard just over the Napa border in neighboring Solano County. The soils here are volcanic and the 2018 version comes in at an even thirteen percent alcohol. The wine is nicely black fruity on the nose, wafting from the glass in a youthful blend of dark berries, dark soil tones, hickory smoke, herb tones and a touch of botanicals in the upper register that recall Canary Islands’ wines. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tangy and nicely transparent, with a respectable core, moderate tannins and a long, vibrant and primary finish. This is light on its feet and should blossom nicely, but it is a fairly unique expression of pinot noir. I have no real sense how it is going to evolve stylistically as it blossoms with bottle age. 2026-2050. **89+?**

**2018 Pinot Noir “La Source” Seven Springs Estate- Evening Land (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The La Source cuvée from Evening Land hails from the parcel of vines at the top of the hillside in Seven Springs, with a steep incline and plenty of afternoon and evening winds coming in here through the Van Duzer Corridor. The wine is raised in roughly thirty percent new oak and the 2018 version comes in at an even fourteen percent in this warm growing season, offering up a superb bouquet of black cherries, plums, gamebird, woodsmoke, a hint of anise, dark soil tones, a touch of fresh herbs and a deft foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe tannins and a long, tangy, nascently complex and impeccably balanced finish. This is a dynamite bottle of pinot noir in the making, but it will need some time alone in the cellar to blossom. 2028-2065+. **94.**

**2018 Pinot Noir “Hyland Vineyard” Coury Clone- Kelley Fox Wines (McMinnville)**

Kelley Fox’s bottling from the Hyland Vineyard hails from a parcel of Coury clones of pinot noir that were planted on red volcanic soil on their *franc de pied* roots in 1988. The 2018

version comes in at 13.5 percent octane, includes thirty percent whole clusters and delivers a beautiful young bouquet of wild strawberries, cherries, a whisper of beetroot, cinnamon stem tones, a complex base of soil, cumin and just a whisper of cedar from the older casks. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and superbly balanced, with a fine core, lovely transparency and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. I love the backend energy of this wine, which dances across the palate. It is still quite young and I would not touch a bottle for a decade, but it is going to be stunning when it is ready to drink. 2030-2080. **94+**.

**2018 Pinot Noir “Three Otters”- Fullerton Wines (Willamette Valley) screwcap**

The Three Otters bottling is the entry level pinot noir from Alex Fullerton. The wine includes about a quarter whole clusters, is fermented with indigenous yeasts and is raised almost entirely in used barrels, with perhaps one new cask creeping into the rotation each year. As the wine is sealed under a screwcap, it needs some aeration to blossom properly once open. The 2018 version comes in at a suave 13.5 percent octane and eventually offers up a bright bouquet of cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh herbs, a nice dollop of soil tones and a topnote of spice. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tangy and still fairly tightly-knit, with a nice core, good soil undertow, modest tannins and a long, complex finish. As this is already a touch reductive, the wine definitely wants decanting prior to serving, just to open it up. It has the balance to age nicely for a dozen years or more, but the reductive pinching already starting from the closure would nudge me into drinking it over the relative near-term and not take a chance on its evolution under this closure. The wine itself is lovely and a fine, fine value, but it cries out for an agglomerated cork, so customers will not have to jump through decanting hoops to get the wine to blossom. 2020-2026+? **88**.

**2018 Pinot Noir “Five Faces”- Fullerton Wines (Willamette Valley) screwcap**

The Five Faces bottling of pinot noir from the Fullerton family is raised in twenty-five percent new oak, sees a ten day “cold soak”, uses thirty percent whole clusters and is fermented with indigenous yeasts. The 2018 Five Faces comes in at 13.6 percent and offers up a lovely and black fruity nose of black cherries, plums, cola, a hint of fresh herbs, bonfire, dark soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with lovely balance and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, nascently complex and bouncy finish. This has lovely potential, and though it is quite approachable out of the blocks, I would be inclined to give it some bottle age and let its secondary layers of complexity emerge. Though this too is bottled under screwcap, it is not showing any of the reductive elements of the Three Otters bottling at the present time. 2023-2055. **89+**.

**2018 Pinot Noir “Arborbrook Vineyard”- Fullerton Wines (Chehelam Mountains)**

Alex Fullerton treats his Arborbrook Vineyard bottling in an interesting fashion, as he breaks it into thirds at the outset, with one-third completely destemmed, one-third including fifty percent whole clusters and the final third including all the stems in the fermentation. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in twenty percent new oak prior to bottling. The 2018 comes in at 13.9 percent octane (still quite moderate for this warm summer) and offers up a fine young nose of dark berries, black cherries, dark soil tones, black tea, discreet new oaky tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core of black fruit, well-integrated tannins and a long, promising finish. This is a bit buttoned up and not as detailed out of the blocks at the Momtazi and will demand some cellaring time to blossom, whereas the Momtazi only suggests this course of action and is likely to be drunk before its time! 2028-2055+. **92**.

### **2018 Pinot Noir “Bjornson Vineyard”- Fullerton Wines (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The 2018 Bjornson Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from the Fullerton family includes forty-five percent whole clusters and was raised in twenty-five percent new oak in this vintage. The wine is already offering up a quite expressive bouquet of red plums, cherries, cocoa powder, fresh thyme, a fine base of soil, a discreet framing of vanillin oak and a lovely hint of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured out of the blocks, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, ripe and well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and well-balanced finish. 2026-2060. **92.**

### **2018 Pinot Noir “Lichtenwalter Vineyard”- Fullerton Wines (Ribbon Ridge)**

The 2018 Lichtenwalter Vineyard cuvée of pinot noir from Fullerton Wines includes fifty-five percent whole clusters, with a portion of the blend fermented in roto-fermenter. Like all of the Fullerton wines, it is fermented with indigenous yeasts, and this bottling is raised in forty percent new oak, prior to bottling without fining or filtration. The wine comes in at 13.9 percent in 2018 and offers up a superb, black fruity nose of black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, gamebird, a touch of allspice, a fine base of dark soil tones, woodsmoke, sweet stems and a nice foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely transparent down to the soil, with a fine core, tangy acids, ripe tannins and a long, youthfully complex and very promising finish. This is impeccably balanced, but also probably the most powerful of the single vineyard pinots I tasted from Alex Fullerton in 2018, and it will demand some cellaring before it blossoms. In due time, it will be a superb bottle. 2028-2065. **92+.**

### **2018 Pinot Noir “Momtazi Vineyard”- Fullerton Wines (McMinnville)**

The Momtazi Vineyard bottling from Alex Fullerton is completely destemmed, fermented with indigenous yeasts, sees one-third of the cuvée fermented in roto-fermenters and is aged in eighteen percent new oak, for its first eleven months, prior to *assemblage* in tank for five months prior to bottling without fining or filtration. The 2018 Momtazi is a beautiful wine that shows the lovely, black fruity personality of this vineyard, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, chicory, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, cedar, lovely herb tones redolent of cumin and bay and a hint of the cola to come in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely structured out of the blocks, with a fine core and soil signature, ripe tannins, tangy acids and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced and very promising finish. This approachable out of the blocks, but it deserves some quiet time alone in the cellar prior to really blossom and reveal all of its charms. 2026-2065. **93.**

### **2018 Pinot Noir “Claudius”- Fullerton Wines (Chehelam Mountains)**

The Claudius bottling of pinot noir from Fullerton Wines is made entirely with a clone of pinot noir planted in the Arbor Brook Vineyard that produces very small berries. The wine is one hundred percent whole clusters, sees a three day “cold soak” and is raised in twenty-five percent new oak, twenty-five percent “one wine” barrels and half in older casks. It was bottled unfiltered and unfiltered after sixteen months of *élevage*. The 2018 Claudius offers up a refined bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, dark soil tones, incipient notes of cola, woodsmoke, sweet stems, gentle spice tones and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely structured out of the blocks, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids and a long, nascently complex and promising finish. The back label on this wine says “enjoy now through 2028”, but I have to assume this is a typo, as I would not dream of opening a bottle before that date! This will be excellent, but needs some bottle age to blossom. 2028-2055+. **92+.**

**2018 Pinot Noir “Tenebris”- Fullerton Wines (McMinnville)**

The Tenebris bottling from Fullerton is another of their reserve wines (as is the Claudius), but unlike the Claudius, this is a barrel selection in the cellar, choosing four different casks that show themselves especially well and are then blended together to create this cuvée. The wine ended up being around thirty percent whole clusters, was raised in twenty-five percent new oak and delivers a fine aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, pomegranate, raw cocoa, a lovely foundation of soil, just a hint of stems, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and suave on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a long, vibrant and youthfully complex finish. Fine juice, but this too will want some extended cellaring to come into its own. 2028-2060. **93**.

**2018 Pinot Noir “Petaluma Gap”- Kendric Vineyards (Marin County)**

The 2018 vintage of pinot noir from Stewart Johnson is a fine young wine in the making. It is a bit more black fruity in personality this year than some previous vintages, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and offering up a pure and complex bouquet of black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, a superb base of dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a dollop of fresh thyme, violets and a discreet foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, transparent and tangy, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely balance and grip, ripe tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is outstanding pinot noir in the making, but it will need some time in the cellar to blossom fully. Fine juice. 2026-2060. **93+**.



**2018 Pinot Noir “les Enfants des Nuages”- Madson Winery (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

The fruit for the Pinot Noir “les Enfants des Nuages” bottling from Madson Winery hails from the organically-farmed Toyon Vineyard, which sits on the southwestern end of the Santa Cruz Mountains and is only three miles from the ocean, so very influenced by the cool air coming in off the water. As 2018 was also a cool vintage in the Santa Cruz Mountains, the wine only tips the scales at 12.4 percent octane this year. It was fermented with one hundred percent whole clusters and raised entirely in older Burgundy casks. The wine offers up a deep and complex nose of dark berries, woodsmoke, a nice touch of sweet stems, a hint of pepper, dark soil tones and raw cocoa. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and intensely flavored, with a good core, lovely transparency and grip, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and still quite primary finish. This is going to be a lovely middleweight in due course, but it will need some bottle age to blossom properly. Good juice in the making here! 2028-2055. **91+**.

**2018 Pinot Noir “Russian River Valley”- Merry Edwards Winery**

The 2018 Pinot Noir “Russian River Valley” bottling from Merry Edwards is composed of a blend from six different vineyards in the Russian River Valley. The wine was aged in just over fifty percent new oak and comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane. It offers up a ripe, pretty and still fairly primary nose of black cherries, a touch of blueberry, chocolate, a nice base of soil tones, woodsmoke and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with suave tannins, broad shoulders and a long, slightly warm and nicely plush finish. This is a bit riper than its stated 14.5 percent, but is pretty well balanced for its octane and should open up nicely with a bit of bottle age. It is quite well-made in its style, but cut from a more modern cloth and seems almost be targeted to entice dyed in the wool cabernet sauvignon drinkers about the appeal of pinot noir. 2024-2055. **88+**.

**2018 Pinot Noir “Sonoma Coast”- Merry Edwards Winery**

The 2018 Sonoma Coast bottling of pinot noir from Merry Edwards is also produced from several different vineyard sources, with the 2018 version having been raised in forty-four percent new oak and also coming in listed at 14.5 percent alcohol. The wine is far more expressive aromatically out of the blocks than the Russian River bottling, offering up a complex and quite promising bouquet of red and black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, a fine base of dark soil tones, a touch of meatiness and a stylish foundation of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, complex and full-bodied, with good bounce and grip, far more transparency than in the Russian River cuvée, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and well-balanced finish. Though this is a touch riper than ideal for my palate, it is a very well-made wine and here, I can see a lot of complexity unfolding down the road. Good juice. 2024-2055. **91**.

**2018 Pinot Noir- Presqu’Ile Winery (Santa Barbara County)**

The 2018 Pinot Noir from Presqu’Ile Winery comes in listed at 13.6 percent octane and offers up a youthful and fairly black fruity nose of dark berries, cherries, fresh herb tones, woodsmoke, a good base of dark soil and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely tangy in profile, with a good core and soil signature, measured tannins and a long, nascently complex and nicely balanced finish. This is made from a blend of fruit from two vineyards, with sixty percent from the Presqu’Ile Vineyard and forty percent from Bien Nacido Vineyard. This is a well-made bottle that could do with a few years in the cellar to allow the tannins to relax a bit more and the wood to be fully integrated into the wine. Good juice. 2024-2045. **90+**.

### **2018 Pinot Noir “Willamette Valley”- Résonance Wines**

The 2018 “Willamette Valley” bottling of Pinot Noir from Résonance Wines is composed from fruit from the two estate vineyards owned by the winery, Résonance Vineyard and Découverte Vineyard, as well as additional grapes purchased from other nearby vineyards, including Hyland Vineyard in McMinnville. The wine is raised in twenty percent new oak for fifteen months prior to bottling and the 2018 comes in at 13.5 percent octane. It delivers a lovely, youthful nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, raw cocoa, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, just a whisper of fresh herb tones and a very discreet framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, very good soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is still a puppy and needs five to seven years in the cellar to really blossom properly, but all of the constituent components are in place for an excellent bottle in due course. For around thirty dollars per bottle, it is an outstanding value! 2026-2055. **91.**

### **2018 Pinot Noir- Salem Wine Company (Eola-Amity Hills)**

The 2018 Salem Wine Company bottling of pinot noir from Rajat Parr and Sashi Moorman is made from fruit from three different vineyards (one of them being Evening Land’s Seven Springs), all of which are farmed biodynamically. The 2018 pinot comes in at 13.5 percent octane and delivers a refined bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, fresh thyme and a touch of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is a young and tightly-knit wine and will demand some bottle age to blossom, but all of the constituent components are in place to deliver a lovely bottle in due course. 2026-2055+. **91+.**

### **2017 Pinot Noir “Hyland”- OO Wines (McMinnville)**

The 2017 Hyland Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Chris Hermann and Pierre Millman at OO Wines was fermented in five hundred liter amphora and then raised in oak casks prior to bottling. The wine is produced from the oldest vine block of pinot noir at Hyland, having been planted all the way back in 1972. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of strawberries, cherries, roses, a beautiful base of soil, a touch of sweet stem tones, delicate herb tones and a lovely framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, sappy at the core and beautifully transparent in personality, with great focus and balance, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. The backend lift here is very impressive! This is outstanding pinot noir in the making. 2027-2065. **94.**

### **2017 Pinot Noir- Bee Hunter (Mendocino County)**

This is the entry level bottling of pinot noir from Bee Hunter in this vintage, which has only been produced in 2017, as this is normally the blend that wears the “Anderson Valley” moniker (as in the 2016 below). More than three quarters of the fruit for this bottling in 2017 hails from the three vineyards of Fashauer, Romani and Docker Hill in Anderson Valley. The wine is complex and classy on the nose, offering up a gently weedy blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, lovely spice tones, a good dollop of soil, Mendocino fresh herb tones and a nice touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core, tangy acids, fine focus and grip and a long, moderately tannic finish. This is very, very good pinot for an entry level bottling and will age quite gracefully, though it is certainly not hard to drink at this early age! Impressive juice. 2020-2045. **90.**

**2017 Pinot Noir “Wentzel Vineyard”- Bee Hunter (Anderson Valley)**

The 2017 Wentzel Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Bee Hunter is fermented with indigenous yeasts, includes twenty-five percent whole clusters and was raised in thirty-five percent new oak. The wine offers up a bright and complex bouquet of red plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, dark soil tones, lovely spice tones from the whole clusters, gentle smokiness and a nice touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit and mineral drive, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. I very much like this wine, which comes in at 13.8 percent octane and is quite suave and gently new oaky in style, with a really lovely synthesis of fruit and soil. 2027-2055+. **92+**.

**2017 Pinot Noir “Estate Bottled”- Domaine Anderson (Anderson Valley)**

The Estate bottling of pinot noir from Darrin Low at Domaine Anderson hails from three different vineyard sources in the Anderson Valley. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and was raised in cask for fifteen months prior to bottling, with only three percent of the barrels new. The wine comes in at 13.6 percent and offers up a youthful nose of red and black cherries, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of cedar and a gentle topnote of Anderson Valley fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nicely light on its feet, with a good core, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and still quite youthful finish. This needs some time in the cellar to blossom, as it is still quite primary, but it shows fine promise. 2026-2055. **90**.

**2017 Pinot Noir “Dach Vineyard” - Domaine Anderson (Anderson Valley)**

The Dach Vineyard surrounds the Domaine Anderson winery, looking down on the property from the surrounding hillsides. It is now farmed biodynamically and organically, with the biodynamic section now certified by Demeter. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and was raised almost entirely in used casks, with only eight percent of the barrels new. The 2017 version comes in at 13.8 percent octane and offers up a lovely and refined nose of red and black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, a complex base of soil, woodsmoke, gamebird, a touch of oak and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, impeccable balance and a long, suavely tannic, complex and vibrant finish. This is a lovely bottle in the making. 2025-2065. **92+**.

**2017 Pinot Noir “Pinoli Vineyard”- Domaine Anderson (Anderson Valley)**

The Pinoli Vineyard is Domaine Anderson’s coolest microclimate, with the marine influence leading to slow ripening and later harvesting. The 2017 version comes in at 13.8 percent octane and was fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised mostly in used casks, with only eight percent of the barrels again new for the *élevage* of this wine. The wine is lovely and a bit more black fruity in personality than the Dach Vineyard bottling, offering up a superb nose of dark berries, black cherries, fresh herb tones, a complex base of dark soil, a hint of espresso and just a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a nice touch of sappiness at the core, good mineral drive and bounce, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and quite classy finish. Fine juice. 2026-2065. **92+**.

**2017 Pinot Noir “Walraven Vineyard”- Domaine Anderson (Anderson Valley)**

The Walraven Vineyard is located in one of the warmer corners of Anderson Valley, nestled in the slopes up above the town of Boonville, but afternoon breezes keep the vineyards fairly cool during the growing season and the 2017 is actually the lowest octane of all the Domaine Anderson pinots in this vintage, coming in at 12.8 percent octane. The wine is raised in eleven percent new oak and offers up a lovely, youthful nose of cherries, pomegranate, a lovely base of soil tones, a hint of mustard seed, raw cocoa, fresh thyme and a touch of cedar in the

upper register. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and nicely tangy and light on its feet, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe tannins and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. The backend energy here is excellent. 2026-2065. **93.**

**2017 Pinot Noir “Johan Vineyard”- Day Wines (Van Duzer Corridor)**

The 2017 Johan Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Day Wines includes thirty percent whole clusters in this vintage, was again raised in fifteen percent new oak and was bottled after an *élevage* of twenty-two months. The wine comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and offers up a youthful and very classy bouquet of cherries, blood orange, sweet stem tones, bonfire, a hint of clove, cedar and a beautifully complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still fairly marked by its whole clusters, with a superb core of fruit, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and a very long, youthfully complex and tangy finish. Structurally, this wine is already quite accessible, but it deserves some cellaring time to let those whole cluster tones change to exotic spices from their slightly savory shadings at the present time. 2025-2055+. **92.**



**2017 Pinot Noir “Momtazi Vineyard”- Day Wines (McMinnville)**

The 2017 Momtazi pinot noir from Brianne Day is a beautifully spicy and aromatic example of the vintage, with the bouquet jumping from the glass in a lovely and quite red fruity blend of cherries, pomegranate, allspice, cloves, lavender, woodsmoke, a beautiful base of soil and a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with superb

intensity of flavor and transparency, a good core, buried tannins and a long, vibrant and very complex finish. Unlike the broader-shouldered and more classically black fruity 2018 Momtazi, the 2017 from Brienne is going to evolve into a beautifully spicy middleweight, with great soil signature and intensity of flavor, but a lightness of step that will make it a brilliant partner at the table. 2025-2055. **92.**

**2017 Pinot Noir “Five Faces”- Fullerton Wines (Willamette Valley) screwcap**

The 2017 vintage of Fullerton’s Five Faces pinot noir is just a whisper lower in octane than the 2018, tipping the scales at a very civilized 13.5 percent. The wine is a bit more red fruity in personality than its 2018 counterpart, offering up a lovely nose of strawberries, cherries, a touch of blood orange, fresh nutmeg, lovely soil tones, gamebird, fresh thyme and a bit of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and has a nice core of sappy fruit, with suave tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and very tasty finish. This is really good pinot noir and I am curious why Alex Fullerton chose to bottle a wine this serious under a screwcap. In my universe, it certainly deserves a natural cork. 2020-2045+? **91.**

**2017 Pinot Noir “Meredith Estate”- Merry Edwards Winery (Russian River Valley)**

The Meredith Estate bottling of pinot noir from Merry Edwards is from the first vineyard she purchased and planted, back in 1998. This hillside vineyard is planted on a classic soil foundation of Goldridge sandy loam. The 2017 Meredith Estate bottling comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a pure and nicely black fruity bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, raw cocoa, a fine base of soil tones, woodsmoke and a nice framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a very refined attack, a superb core of fruit, pretty good soil signature, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, youthful and svelte finish. This is still a young wine and needs some bottle age to both start to unlock its secondary layers of complexity, as well as completely integrate its new oak, but it is very nicely balanced and will do so in due course. It will be a very tasty wine in time, cut in a riper style, but with a good undertow of elegant complexity. 2025-2055+. **91+.**

**2017 Pinot Noir- Presqu’Ile Winery (Santa Maria Valley)**

Presqu’Ile Winery’s 2017 pinot noir has nicely measured ripeness, coming in at 13.4 percent alcohol in this vintage. It is composed of a blend of fifty-eight percent fruit from the Presqu’Ile Vineyard (planted in 2009) and forty-two percent from the well-known Bien Nacido Vineyard. It was raised in ten percent new oak for eleven months, then given six months of finishing time in stainless steel prior to bottling. It offers up a promising nose of cherries, dark berries, bonfire, lovely soil tones, balsam bough, a touch of dill and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely soil-driven in personality, with a good core, suave tannins, bright acids and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is still young and deserves a bit more bottle age to really blossom. 2023-2045. **90.**

**2017 Pinot Noir “Découverte Vineyard”- Résonance Wines (Dundee Hills)**

Découverte Vineyard is one of the two estate vineyards owned by Résonance, planted on red volcanic Jory soils. Their 2017 pinot noir from Découverte is excellent, having spent fifteen months in cask prior to bottling, with thirty percent of the barrels new for the 2017 vintage of this cuvée. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of red berries, cherries, gamebird, coffee, a complex base of soil tones, a touch of mustard seed, woodsmoke and a judicious foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and built for the long haul, with a superb core of fruit, fine mineral drive, ripe, well-integrated tannins, still a touch of youthful stems and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is structured like a proper Jacques Lardière wine and will

demand plenty of bottle age to open up, but it will be outstanding when it is ready to drink! 2030-2070+. **92+**.

**2017 Pinot Noir “Résonance Vineyard”- Résonance Wines (Yamhill-Carlton)**

The Résonance Vineyard is the second estate vineyard owned by this Louis Jadot property in Carlton, Oregon, with the vines having been planted on *franc de pied* roots all the way back in 1981 and dry-farmed organically now for many, many years. Like the 2017 Découverte Vineyard bottling, this wine also comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane in this vintage and was also raised in thirty percent new oak this year. The youthful nose is deep and more black fruity in personality than the above wine, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of sweet dark berries, black cherries, raw cocoa, a complex base of dark soil tones, *pigeon*, a touch of sweet stems from the whole clusters, a delicate touch of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely structured out of the blocks, with a good core of sappy fruit, tangy acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, ripely tannic and nascently complex finish. This is every bit as youthful as the 2017 Découverte Vineyard bottling, but it is the inherently more refined wine, and when it is ready to drink, it should end up the slightly more complex and complete wine. Fine, fine juice in the making. 2030-2070+. **93**.

**2016 Pinot Noir “Anderson Valley”- Bee Hunter**

The 2016 “Anderson Valley” bottling of pinot noir from Bee Hunter comes in at 13.8 percent octane and most of the fruit for this cuvée comes from the Fashauer Vineyard. The wine is deep, nascently complex and a bit more black fruity in personality than the 2017 Mendocino bottling, offering up scents of black cherries, cola, dark soil tones, bonfire, licorice and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is tangy, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a fine core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and promising finish. This is a bit more structured than the 2017 Mendocino bottling and will need a few years in the cellar to properly blossom, but it is an excellent wine and will deliver very fine drinking in due course. 2024-2050. **91**.

**2016 Pinot Noir- Domaine Drouhin (Dundee Hills)**

The 2016 Domaine Drouhin Pinot Noir is a gorgeous wine and seems likely to be one of the finest recent vintages of the regular estate bottling here at DDO. The wine comes in listed at 14.1 percent octane and offers up a beautifully complex and refined bouquet of red and black cherries, gamebird, woodsmoke, a superb base of dark soil tones, raw cocoa and a discreet foundation of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is very pure, refined and full-bodied, with a sappy core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and a long, nascently complex and tangy finish that shows great promise for down the road. As is often the case with this bottling from Véronique Drouhin, the 2016 DDO Pinot Noir is approachable out of the blocks, but this is really still a puppy and deserves to be tucked away in the cellar for six to ten years to fully blossom. Fine, fine juice. 2026-2060. **93**.

**2016 Pinot Noir-Rose Rock (Drouhin Oregon) Eola-Amity Hills**

The Drouhin family’s 2016 Rose Rock Pinot Noir is also outstanding, with a slightly more black fruity personality out of the blocks than the 2016 DDO estate bottling. The wine also comes in listed at 14.1 percent alcohol and offers up a refined and classy nose of sweet dark berries, black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, bitter chocolate, a fine foundation of minerality, a hint of graphite and a very refined framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and soil-driven in personality, with a lovely core of black fruit, excellent focus and grip, suave, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. The cooler vineyard sites that

go into this bottling produce a more transparent example out of the blocks than the DDO bottling from the Dundee Hills, without quite the same plushness at the core, but equal intensity of flavor and aging potential. This is a beautiful wine in the making. 2026-2060+. **93.**

**2016 Pinot Noir “The Drawing Board”- Wenzlau Vineyard (Santa Rita Hills)**

The 2016 “The Drawing Board” pinot from Wenzlau Vineyard includes fifteen percent whole clusters and was raised in twenty percent new oak for eighteen months prior to bottling-without fining or filtration. It comes in at 13.1 percent octane and offers up a vibrant and red fruity bouquet of cherries, beetroot, mustard seed, a lovely base of soil tones, woodsmoke and just a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely transparent, with a good core, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and bouncy finish. This is lovely juice. 2020-2045. **91.**



**2015 Pinot Noir “Docker Hill Vineyard”- Bee Hunter (Mendocino)**

The 2015 Docker Hills Vineyard pinot noir from Bee Hunter is another one of the higher octane examples of this variety that I tasted from the winery, and is probably just reflective of the nature of the 2015 growing season. The wine weighs in at 14.9 percent octane and offers up a borderline overripe nose of black fruit, chocolate, hung game, balsamic overtones, dark soil and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, plush and full-bodied, with a bit more freshness than the nose suggests, a good core, but a bit of prune poking out on the long, suavely tannic and nicely

balanced finish. This is well-made and not bad in its idiom, but for my palate, the *sur maturité* takes away from its pleasure quotient. 2020-2040. **87.**

**2015 Pinot Noir “Oppenlander Vineyard”- Bee Hunter (Mendocino)**

The 2015 Oppenlander Vineyard bottling of pinot from Bee Hunter is a pretty ripe customer, tipping the scales at 14.7 percent alcohol. The wine included twenty-five percent whole clusters in 2015, was fermented with indigenous yeasts and was raised in twenty-five percent new oak, twenty-five percent “one wine” barrels and the other half in older casks. The wine shows quite good aromatic purity for its octane, offering up scents of baked black cherries, fresh herb tones, chocolate, dark soil tones, cedary oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven for its ripeness, with a good core of fruit, suave tannins and a long, complex and gently warm finish. This carries its alcohol quite well, but it does not show the same precision on the nose and palate as the lower octane pinots from Bee Hunter that I tasted for this report and I would have loved to have seen it a point lower in alcohol. 2020-2040. **87.**

**2015 Pinot Noir “Yamhill-Carlton”- Belle Pente Wine Cellars**

The 2015 “Yamhill-Carlton” bottling of pinot noir from Belle Pente Wine Cellars comes in at 13.7 percent octane and offers up a bright, red fruity and nascently complex nose of cherries, pomegranate, raw cocoa, a lovely base of soil, a dollop of fresh thyme, a bit of cedary oak and a nice array of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a sappy core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and very promising finish. This wine is already quite nicely open on the nose, but on the palate it is still a touch buttoned up behind its structural chassis and I would be tempted to give it another three to five years in the cellar before starting to drink it in earnest. It is a very lovely wine. 2023-2050+. **92.**

**2015 Pinot Noir “Mount Carmel”- Wenzlau Vineyard (Santa Rita Hills)**

The 2015 Mount Carmel Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Wenzlau Vineyard is a tad riper than The Perch, but still eminently sensible at thirteen percent octane in this vintage. It included fifty percent whole clusters in this vintage and was raised in thirty percent new casks. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of cherries, a touch of blood orange, good soil tones, fresh herbs, bonfire, a hint of dill and a nice touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core, fine soil signature, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and classy finish. This is a lovely bottle. 2020-2045+. **91+.**

**2015 Pinot Noir “The Perch”- Wenzlau Vineyard (Santa Rita Hills)**

The Perch bottling is named for a corner of the organically-farmed Wenzlau Vineyard that hangs on the edge of a four hundred and fifty foot cliff. It is plenty windy here and the 2015 bottling comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane. The wine includes fifty percent whole clusters in this vintage and was raised in about forty percent new oak. It delivers lovely aromatic complexity in its mix of red and black cherries, gamebird, a hint of cocoa powder, a lovely base of soil tones, sweet stem spices, woodsmoke and a very suave framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with lovely transparency and bounce, suave tannins and a long, complex and very well balanced finish. This is quite delicious already, with the tannins nicely buried, but it will also age very well. Fine juice. 2020-2045+. **92.**

**2014 Pinot Noir “Wiley Vineyard”- Bee Hunter (Anderson Valley)**

I have had some lovely bottlings of pinot noir from the cool and foggy Wiley Vineyard, particularly those produced by Thomas Fogarty, and the 2014 bottling from Bee Hunter is

another excellent example of this fine *terroir*. The wine comes in at 13.7 percent octane and offers up a cherries, plums, cocoa powder, a nice touch of beetroot, lovely spice tones, a fine base of soil and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a good core, lovely soil signature, buried tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This is still in climbing mode and will be an even better drink five years down the road, but at age six it is starting to stir and is already very tasty. Impressive juice! 2020-2055. **93.**

**2014 Pinot Noir “Yamhill-Carlton”- Belle Pente Wine Cellars**

The 2014 Pinot Noir bottling of “Yamhill-Carlton” from Belle Pente is still fairly youthful at six years of age, as this more structured vintage would like a bit more time in the cellar to really blossom into unabashed generosity. However, with a bit of coaxing, there is still pleasure to be found here in its adolescence, as the wine offers up a very pretty nose of cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh nutmeg, a fine base of soil tones and a gentle foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with tangy acids, a fine core of fruit, good soil signature and a long, ripely tannic and well-balanced finish. I have a few more of these in the cellar and I am going to leave them alone for the next four or five years and really let the wine relax structurally. 2025-2055. **91.**

**2013 Pinot Noir “McDougall Ranch”- Kutch Wines (Sonoma Coast)**

The 2013 vintage of McDougall Ranch from Jamie Kutch is really starting to drink beautifully as it crosses the threshold into its eight year. The bouquet is pure, precise and really starting to show its secondary layers of complexity in its blend of red and black cherries, sweet beetroot, woodsmoke, smoked meats, lovely spice tones, complex soil elements, turmeric and mustard seed and a discreet framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is a low octane vintage of McDougall, coming in at 12.3 percent, but it is loaded with personality and intensity of flavor and is a superb bottle that is just starting to reach its plateau of maturity, where it should dazzle for several decades! 2021-2050+. **94.**

**2013 Pinot Noir “San Mateo County”- Rhys Vineyards (half bottle)**

The 2013 San Mateo County bottling of pinot noir from Rhys Vineyards is composed of fruit from a less-gifted section of the Family Farm Vineyard, coupled with a bit of younger vine fruit tossed in from the Alpine and Horseshoe Vineyards. At seven years of age it is starting to really drink well out of half, offering up a bright and impressively classy nose of black cherries, grilled meats, dark soil, a touch of currant leaf, coffee bean, still a bit of sweet stem tones, woodsmoke and a nice touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, fine balance and grip, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, vibrant and nicely soil-driven finish. This was a touch fruit-driven out of the blocks, but it is aging beautifully and far more defined by its *terroir* than previously; I clearly underestimated it back in 2015! 2020-2045. **92.**

**2013 Pinot Noir “Bearwallow Vineyard”- Rhys Vineyards (Anderson Valley) half bottle**

The 2013 Bearwallow pinot noir from Rhys Vineyards is really at a lovely point of maturity out of half bottle today. The deep and complex bouquet shows lovely secondary shadings in its blend of black cherries, black plums, a touch of cola, incipient notes of black truffle, a bit of roasted gamebird, dark soil tones and nice smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely soil-driven, with the soil tones getting

some autumnal shadings, melting tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This is just gorgeous today out of half bottle! 2020-2040+. **94.**

**2011 Pinot Noir “Signal Ridge Vineyard”- Bravium Wines (Mendocino Ridge)**

The 2011 Signal Ridge Vineyard bottling of pinot noir from Bravium is aging very nicely and is drinking well at nine years of age. The bouquet is bright and complex, offering up a fine blend of cherries, plums, woodsmoke, gamebird, dark soil tones, a touch of new oak and a nice array of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a good core, melting tannins, good acids and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. This is quite ripe for the cool 2011, coming in at 14.3 percent octane, but is aging very gracefully. 2020-240. **91+**.



***Zinfandel***

**2016 Zinfandel “Fashauer Vineyard”- Bee Hunter (Anderson Valley)**

The 2016 Zinfandel “Fashauer Vineyard” bottling from Bee Hunter hails from one of the higher elevation vineyards in Mendocino, so that the vines are up above the fog line and can ripen fully in the cooler heights. The 2016 comes in listed at 14.8 percent alcohol and delivers a ripe and varietally correct nose of red and black raspberries, brambly fruit undertones, clove-like spices, a fine base of soil tones, a hint of dill, dried flowers, bonfire and a nice touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core, impressive soil signature and grip, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This carries its octane very

well indeed and does not seem hot at all on the backend. In an age of global warming, this is quite impressive zinfandel. 2020-2045. **90+**.

**2014 JJ Cuvée- Bee Hunter (Mendocino County)**

The 2014 JJ Cuvée from Bee Hunter is composed primarily of zinfandel, with a bit of syrah added to the blend and just a dollop of pinot noir to bring out that certain *je ne sais pas quoi*. The 2014 vintage comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and is still currently available from the winery for purchase. It offers up a bright, ripe and spicy nose of raspberries, fruitcake, baking spices, roasted meats and a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and spicy, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins, tangy acids and very good length and grip on the complex finish. This starts out very jammy when first opened, but pulls itself together and shows more precision on both the nose and palate, once it has had some air. It is quite tasty, though the 14.5 percent octane seems a wee bit understated to my palate. 2020-2040. **88**.

**1977 Dehlinger Winery Zinfandel “Sonoma County”**

The 1977 vintage of Dehlinger zinfandel is composed of a blend of eighty-one percent zinfandel and nineteen percent petit sirah. The wine comes in listed at 12.9 percent octane and was bottled after twenty months *élevage*. The wine today remains quite vibrant aromatically, offering up an excellent nose of dried berries, lovely spice tones, smoked meats, balsam bough, bonfire, a fine base of autumnal soil and a touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is a bit more evolved than the nose suggests, but still full-bodied, complex and nicely tertiary in personality, with a good remaining core, tangy, well-integrated acids and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is getting to the far end of its plateau and probably already has its first step planted on the hillside for its decline down the far side, but it remains tasty. 2020-2027. **87**.

**1969 Souverain Cellars “Mountain Zinfandel” (Napa Valley)**

Lee Stewart’s 1969 Zinfandel came in at thirteen percent octane and continues to cruise along quite nicely at fifty-one years of age. I have been fortunate to drink several of Lee’s cabernet bottlings from this era, which were among the finest to be found in Napa Valley in the 1950s and 1960s, but this is the first zinfandel I have ever tasted from his Souverain winery. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a tertiary, but still vibrant blend of brambly fruit, cigar smoke, menthol, a touch of fruitcake, gentle, clove-like spice tones, paraffin, hung game and a touch of redwood-like spicy barrel notes in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, velvety on the attack and a nicely tangy on the backend, with perfectly respectable depth in the mid-palate. With air, there is still a bit of tannin that perks up the finish, which has admirable grip and focus for a zinfandel of this age and which does not hail from a particularly stellar vintage in Napa! This is really quite good juice and retains further life in it. 2020-2030+. **90**.

***Merlot and Cabernet Franc***

**2019 Cabernet Franc “Willow Vineyard”- Forge Cellars (Seneca Lake)**

The 2019 Willow Vineyard bottling of cabernet franc from Forge Cellars included forty percent whole clusters in this vintage. The soils of the Willow Vineyard are sandy loam and shale and the wine this year comes in at 12.5 percent octane. It offers up a lovely and gently sappy bouquet of cassis, sweet dark berries, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of juniper berry and a very discreet framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine detail and soil signature, ripe tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long

and youthfully complex finish. This is first class cabernet franc that really recalls Chinon stylistically. It will want a bit of cellaring before it starts to stir, but this is excellent wine in the making. 2024-2050. **91**.

### **2018 Merlot “Black Vineyard”- Colète (Napa Valley)**

This is the second vintage of merlot from Colète, which is a collaboration between Rajat Parr and Marie Vayron Ponsonnet, whose family owns Château Bourgneuf in Pomerol. The wine is produced from a parcel of twenty year-old, organically farmed merlot vines, with the wine fermented in *foudre* and raised exclusively in used barrels for twenty-two months prior to bottling. The 2018 tips the scales at a cool thirteen percent octane and offers up a black fruity and youthful nose of cassis, saddle leather, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a touch of currant leaf and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely structured, with a good core, fine soil signature, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, nascently complex and quite promising finish. This is built to age like a Pomerol and will need some bottle age to blossom, but it will be a fine drink once it is ready. 2030-2060+. **91+**.

### **2018 Cabernet Franc- Terrassen Wine Cellars (Finger Lakes)**

The cabernet franc bottling from Thomas Pastuszak and Jessica Brown at Terrassen is produced from thirty year-old vines, planted on gravel, clay and shale soils. The 2018 comes in at twelve percent alcohol, is nicely transparent in color and offers up a bright bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, currant leaf, cherry stone, a hint of cigar smoke and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and vibrant, with a good core, excellent soil signature and grip, moderate tannins and a long, bouncy finish. This is done in the style of one of those more forward examples of Chinon from the early 1980s made for quaffing in the brasseries of Paris, but with a bit more grip and mineral drive on the backend. It is a well-made wine in its style, but it would be more interesting to see this bottling done in a more ambitious manner that acknowledges the more serious side of the grape found at places like Domaine Baudry. 2020-2030. **88**.

### **2017 Merlot “aux Raynauds”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

David Jeffrey makes outstanding merlot and his 2017 is one of his finest vintages to date for this varietal. The wine comes in at 14.2 percent octane and offers up a nascently complex and quite classy nose of dark berries, plums, espresso, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones and a deft touch of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, refined and full-bodied, with lovely soil transparency, a fine core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins and a long, tangy and very promising finish. This merlot crafted for grown-ups and starts out life properly structured, as a top flight Pomerol might be and will deserve some cellaring time to start to properly blossom and delivery on its excellent potential. With Terry and Frances Leighton at Kalin Cellars no longer making a merlot bottling, to my palate, Calluna makes the finest example in California today from this grape. 2027-2055+. **93+**.

### **1997 Merlot “Ciel du Cheval Vineyard”- Andrew Will Wines (Washington State)**

The 1997 “Ciel du Cheval Vineyard” bottling of Merlot from Chris Camarda at Andrew Will is drinking splendidly at age twenty-three. The wine is quite suave in personality, coming in at an even thirteen percent octane and delivering a beautifully refined bouquet of sweet dark berries, plums, currant leaf, a lovely base of dark soil, cigar smoke, just a touch of Pomerol-like herb tones, menthol and a very discreet framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, full-

bodied and fully resolved, with fine focus and grip, melted tannins and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. It has been more than seven years since I last drank a bottle of this wine and times has seemingly not touched this wine in the interim (I wish the same could be said for your correspondent!). This will continue to cruise along beautifully for many years to come. 2020-2035. **91.**



### ***Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux-Inspired Blends***

#### **2018 Cabernet Sauvignon “Bright Light Vineyard”- Ordeaux (Golden Cluster)**

The 2018 vintage is the first release from Golden Cluster’s new cabernet project in the Columbia River Gorge in Washington state, which they have dubbed Ordeaux. The wine is composed entirely of cabernet sauvignon, comes in at 14.5 percent octane and was fermented with indigenous yeasts and bottled unfinned and unfiltered. It offers up an excellent and complex nose of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones and a nice touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite elegant in personality, with a good core, fine focus and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex finish that shows just a whisper of backend heat. This is made from six year-old vines, so there is not quite the core that this wine will have when the vines have gotten older, but the wine is excellent in quality and is a very welcome new addition to the firmament of old school, classic examples of cabernet sauvignon (and a fine value). 2025-2055. **91.**

### **2017 C.V.C- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

David Jeffrey's Bordeaux-style blend this year is comprised of fifty-two percent merlot, eighteen percent cabernet sauvignon, seventeen percent cabernet franc, seven percent petit verdot and six percent malbec. The wine was raised in twenty percent new oak and comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane, primarily due to the heat spike at the end of August of 2017. The wine still offers up beautiful purity on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of dark berries, black plums, tobacco leaf, a lovely foundation of soil, a discreet framing of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with lovely focus and grip, ripe tannins and just a whisper of backend heat poking out on the long and complex finish. This is a touch riper in style than is customary with David's wines, due to the *fin de saison* of 2017, but the wine is still every bit as elegant as one has come to expect from Calluna Vineyards. 2025-2055. **92.**

### **2017 Cabernet Sauvignon- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon bottling from David Jeffrey at Calluna Vineyards is composed of a blend this year of seventy-eight percent cabernet sauvignon, fourteen percent cabernet franc, four percent merlot and two percent each of petit verdot and malbec. The vineyard weathered the heat spike at the backend of the growing season quite well, so the wine comes in listed at a very respectable 14.2 percent this year, though David comments that "it is a bit riper than ideally I would like." The nose is beautifully precise, wafting from the glass in a mix of sweet cassis, black cherries, lead pencil, cigar ash, dark soil tones and a discreet foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and impressively light on its feet for this varietal, with a good core, lovely soil signature and grip, ripe, buried tannins and a long, complex and gently warm finish. This wine will age very gracefully, despite it being a bit riper in personality than most vintages of Calluna cabernet. 2029-2065+. **92.**

### **2017 Cabernet Sauvignon "Block One"- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)**

The Block One bottling of cabernet from Calluna Vineyards was bottled on its own, as it was the only parcel that had not been cleared before the wildfires started in September in the region. As the winds carried the smoke away from the grapes, the wine is not smoke tainted at all, but David Jeffrey wanted to bottle it on its own, as it benefited from the drop in temperatures after the heat spike of late August and consequently came in a touch lower in octane from the other cabernet bottling, tipping the scales this year at an even fourteen percent. The wine delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of black cherries, dark berries, cigar smoke, a lovely base of soil tones, a touch of tobacco leaf and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a superb core of fruit, excellent soil undertow, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. The additional hang time that the Block One was allowed gives the wine a slightly more polished texture to the tannins than the regular cabernet this year. Fine juice. 2029-2065+. **93.**

### **2017 Cabernet Sauvignon "Kronos Vineyard"- Corison Winery (Napa Valley)**

The 2017 Kronos Vineyard bottling of cabernet sauvignon from Cathy Corison is a superb bottle in the making. This vintage comes in at 13.9 percent octane and delivers a beautifully pure and youthfully complex bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, Rutherford Dust, a hint of the mintiness to come, a superb base of soil tones and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is refined, full-bodied and seamlessly balanced, with an excellent core and soil signature, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a long, poised and still quite tightly-knit finish. This is a thoroughbred that is going to need fifteen years in the cellar to blossom, but it is going to be dazzling once it is ready to drink. 2035-2085. **95.**

**2017 Cabernet Sauvignon “Gravelly Meadow”- Diamond Creek Vineyards (Napa Valley)**

The 2017 Gravelly Meadow bottling from Diamond Creek comes in listed at 14.5 percent, which is pretty moderate, given the heat spike in August in this growing season. The wine offers up a beautifully precise and nicely old school aromatic constellation of cassis, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, gravelly soil tones, a touch of currant leaf and a discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a good core of fruit, excellent mineral undertow, ripe, chewy and well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. I really like this wine, which retains all of the classical proportions that Al Brounstein first championed at Diamond Creek beginning in 1968, and though the wine is fairly ripe in 2017, one has the sense that this remains true to its historical roots and an unequivocally old school style of cabernet sauvignon. 2032-2100. **94+**.

**2017 Cabernet Sauvignon “Red Rock Terrace”- Diamond Creek Vineyards (Napa Valley)**

The 2017 Red Rock Terrace cabernet from the team at Diamond Creek is also an outstanding example of this vintage. The bouquet offers up a youthfully complex blend of blackberries, tobacco leaf, a superb base of dark soil tones, cigar ash and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off fine mid-palate depth, with firm, ripe tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, still fairly primary finish. This is also listed at 14.5 percent octane, but it is a slightly warmer microclimate than Gravelly Meadow and I get the sense that this is just a touch riper in personality this year than that wine. It is also very good, but less detailed out of the blocks and will demand some cellaring before it really starts to blossom. 2033-2100. **94**.

**2017 Cabernet Sauvignon “Volcanic Hill”- Diamond Creek Vineyards (Napa Valley)**

The 2017 Volcanic Hill cuvée from Diamond Creek is a simply outstanding bottle of cabernet sauvignon in the making. The nose is deep, pure and youthful, wafting from the glass in a mix of cassis, cigar ash, stony soil tones, tobacco leaf, plenty of smokiness and a refined foundation of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully focused, with a very good core, fine soil signature, buried, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. What I like about all three of the 2017s from Diamond Creek is that they have plenty of depth and weight, without every feeling “pumped up” from cellar techniques or other modern winemaking distortions. They are more elegant out of the blocks than the wines were back in Al Brounstein’s heyday, but still very much true to their *terroirs* and built for the long haul, without artifice or compromise. Most impressive! 2033-2100. **95**.

**2017 Cabernet Sauvignon “Waterhorse Ridge”- Enfield Wine Company (Sonoma)**

The 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon “Waterhorse Ridge” bottling from John Lockwood and Amy Seese at Enfield Wine Company is produced from vines that were planted in 1999 in two different vineyards, Fort Ross and Seaview, both of which are farmed organically. Between the two, the *cépages* of the wine ends up being eighty percent cabernet sauvignon, ten percent merlot and five percent each of cabernet franc and petit verdot. The wine comes in at 13.8 percent octane and delivers a fine, youthful bouquet of cassis, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and a hint of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with lovely soil inflection, a very good core of fruit, ripe, excellent balance and grip, buried tannins and a long, structured and very promising finish. This is outstanding, old school cabernet in the making. 2027-2065. **92+**.

**2017 Le Petit Caporal- Ravines Wine Cellars (Finger Lakes)**

The Le Petit Caporal cuvée from Ravines Wine Cellars is a blend of one-third each of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and cabernet franc. All of the grapes hail from either the Argetsinger

Vineyard or its next door neighbor, the Glen Eldridge Vineyard. The wine is quite Bordeaux-like in that old school way of the 1970s and early 1980s, offering up a nascently complex nose of cassis, dark berry, cigar ash, current leaf, chalky soil tones and just a wisp of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely structured, with tangy acids, ripe tannins and fine focus and grip on the very long, nascently complex finish. I love the backend lift here, which augurs extremely well for its eventual blossoming and long life in bottle. It is properly structured out of the blocks and needs some bottle age to soften up, but it is an excellent wine! 2027-2055. **91+**.

#### **2017 Cabernet Sauvignon “Napa Valley”- Maison d’Amis**

Michael Villas is making beautiful, old school examples of Napa Valley cabernet sauvignon-based wines at Maison d’Amis. His current releases are from the 2014 vintage, as he believes in letting the wines start to stir a bit with bottle age in the cellar prior to release. The notes on his excellent 2014s appear below. However, he also sent me samples of two of his 2017s, which are not yet released and may well be the next vintage out of the cellars, as both the 2015s and 2016s here are pretty structured and may demand a bit more time in the bottle prior to release. The bouquet on the 2017 cabernet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a classic blend of black cherries, cassis, Rutherford dust soil tones, cigar wrapper and a discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex and gently warm finish. This wine seems a bit riper in personality than I surmise is Michael’s preferred style (his 2014s are all well south of fourteen percent alcohol), due to the heat spike in August, but it is a very well made wine and shows no smoke issues that I can notice. 2030-2070. **91+**.

#### **2017 Red Table Wine “Napa Valley”- Maison d’Amis**

The Red Table Wine bottling from Michael Villas at Maison d’Amis is roughly a fifty-fifty blend of cabernet sauvignon and merlot. This too is not yet released, but is likely to be the next vintage out of the blocks from the winery. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of cassis, dark berries, a touch of currant leaf, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and a refined foundation of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite elegant in personality, with a fine core of black fruit, good soil signature, suave tannins and a long, complex and fairly ripe finish. This is an excellent bottle, with lovely balance and I love the lift and Bordeaux-like backend flavors. 2027-2055. **92**.

#### **2017 Maximilien- Ravines Wine Cellars (Finger Lakes)**

Morten Hallgren’s 2017 Maximilien bottling is a blend of fifty-four percent merlot and forty-six percent cabernet sauvignon. The wine does not show the same lovely, current leaf aromatics found in the Le Petit Caporal (probably due to no cabernet franc in the blend), but it does share lovely *Bordelais* aesthetic sensibilities with its bouquet of cassis, cigar ash, tobacco leaf, a good base of stony soil tones, just a touch of oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, modest tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and fairly complex finish. This is made more in a style for earlier accessibility and is very nicely done in its style, but it will also age nicely. It is not as complex as the Le Petit Caporal bottling, but it is a very well-made wine. 2020-2035. **89**.



#### **2014 Cabernet Sauvignon “Napa Valley”- Maison d’Amis**

Michael Villas’ 2014 Napa Valley bottling from Maison d’Amis is composed of fruit from four different vineyard sources across the valley- three providing the ninety-three percent cabernet sauvignon in the blend and the fourth the seven percent of cabernet franc. The wine is raised in fifty percent new oak for twenty-two months prior to bottling and comes in at a svelte 13.2 percent octane in 2014. It offers up a superb young bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar ash, a hint of eucalyptus, a lovely base of soil tones, tobacco leaf and a refined base of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with a good core, fine focus and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. I like this wine’s old school sensibilities very much, as it has not been forced into a guise of early drinkability, but is properly structured (as a young, serious Napa cabernet ought to be) and will demand some cellaring to blossom into drinking generosity. It will be a lovely and long-lived wine once it is fully ready to drink. Impressive. 2027-2065. **92+**.

#### **2014 Cabernet Sauvignon “Rutherford”- Maison d’Amis**

The 2014 Rutherford cuvée of cabernet sauvignon from Michael Villa is composed entirely of cabernet this year and was raised in thirty percent new oak for twenty-two months prior to bottling. It is just a touch riper than the 2014 Napa Valley Cab, coming in at a still very civilized 13.6 percent alcohol. The classy nose wafts from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, a touch of allspice, cigar smoke, Rutherford dust soil tones and a discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature and grip, ripe, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex and perfectly

balanced finish. This could be a great old vintage of BV Reserve cabernet in its youth, if it had been raised in American oak, instead of French casks! Superb juice. 2028-2065+. **94.**

**2014 Red Wine “Napa Valley”- Maison d’Amis**

The 2014 Red Wine from Maison d’Amis is composed in this vintage of a blend of fifty-two percent cabernet sauvignon and forty-eight percent merlot. It was raised in thirty percent new oak and comes in again at a svelte 13.6 percent octane. The wine delivers an complex and very classy bouquet of cassis, black cherries, a touch of mint, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and a refined touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and exceptionally well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow, fine-grained tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This is nicely structured and will age very well, but it is more forward today than the 2014 cabernet sauvignon bottlings from Maison d’Amis and is already starting to drink pretty well and it is no longer a crime to open a bottle, though it will be even better down the road. 2020-2055. **93.**

## ROUND TWO OF RECENTLY-TASTED CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING WINES DECEMBER 2020



The pandemic and the economic upheaval that has happened across the globe has wreaked havoc in wine shipping over the last several months, so many new releases in the New York market are arriving here in the states much later than would customarily be the case in normal times. This was particularly true of Champagne and sparkling wine shipments, which most US importers try to time to arrive here in October to be in position to take advantage of the typical American demand for bubbly over the last two months of the year, where we foolish Americans tend to execute the vast, vast majority of our annual sparkling wine consumption. For many years, I have personally bucked this American characteristic and have happily drunk my sparkling wines over the entire year. In any case, a lot of the sparkling wines that would normally have made it into the coverage in the last issue did not arrive on these shores until after the start of November and it seemed logical to write a follow-up piece right away on these wines, so that they would not disappear from the market before I had a chance to cover them in the newsletter. I would customarily try to space out follow-up reports such as this (and the one on the Rhône Valley that also appears in this newsletter) a few issues further apart, but as a lot of the wines that are written up in this feature are in relatively short supply, time seemed of the essence in putting together a “Round Two” on Champagne in this current issue.

As I have expanded my writing about the Champagne region in particular since the poll of subscribers done several years back about whether or not to continue coverage of Bordeaux *En Primeur* each year, or use the time for another region, sparkling wine reports these days usually appear three times per year, as there is an awful lot of ground to cover in the region (not to mention all of the fine sparkling wine produced outside of the Champagne region itself). For subscribers who may be relatively new to the journal, after my coverage of the then new 2012 vintage in Bordeaux in April of 2013, I conducted a poll of subscribers to see if they wished me to continue attending and writing up the spring *En Primeur* tastings. I had a growing sense at that time that this was a topic of lagging interest to readers of View From the Cellar, so sent out the poll to see if my intuition was correct on this topic. A bit more than three hundred people kindly took the time to respond to my query, with only two of them voting to keep up the annual *En Primeur* coverage (though many of those folks voting against *En Primeur* did emphasize that they did not wish coverage of Bordeaux to disappear from these pages, but rather they wished for me to focus primarily on estate profiles and vintage retrospectives more and leave the *En Primeur* coverage to others). Part of my question to readers had been if I was to forego the customary ten days or two weeks spent in Bordeaux each spring, which wine-producing region should I substitute for that slot in my annual spring trip to Europe. The vast, vast majority of responses indicated that I should devote that time to expanded coverage of Champagne and other sparkling wines and that has what I have done since that time.

Thus, since 2014, the coverage of sparkling wines here has been quite a bit broader than it was previously. I still try to spread out the articles a bit more than one right on the heels of the last, as is the case with this report, but as I mentioned above, nothing has been easy in 2020 and a lot of the bubbly planned for the end of the year holiday season in the US ended up getting delayed in shipping and arrived into New York far later than any of the importers or producers might have wished. Though this article is fairly brief, it does include an awful lot of superb bottles of Champagne, as a great many top cuvées were earmarked for autumn shipping into the states, so as to be available for the holiday season. Notes on new releases from great small growers like Aurélien Suenen, Fabrice Gass (of Champagne Alexandre Filaine), Agnès Corbon and Frédéric Savart are interspersed here with slightly larger producers like Benoît Marguet in Ambonnay and *Grandes Marques* such as Taittinger, Krug and Gosset, so there are a lot of brilliant quality cuvées covered in the pages that follow. I was particularly pleased to taste two new bottlings from Champagne Gosset in Épernay, as they have just recently released their first bottling of Blanc de Noirs, as well as a special non-vintage cuvée that they call “12 Ans de Cave” and which, as the name implies, is given at least twelve years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and release into the market. It is a great wine, and given Gosset’s tradition of not allowing their wines to go through malolactic fermentation, it fully underscores how beautifully this *maison’s* wines blossom with extended cellaring. The first release of “12 Ans de Cave” is from the base year of 2006, and as readers will see below, the wine is drinking brilliantly well.

## **Sec**

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

The new release of Taittinger’s “Nocturne” Sec bottling is composed of a blend of forty percent chardonnay, thirty-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent pinot meunier. The wine ages four years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and was finished with a *dosage* of 17.5 grams per liter. It offers up a complex bouquet of apple, white peach, *patissière*, chalky soil

tones and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, refined *mousse*, vibrant acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and very nicely balanced finish. This bottling has gotten more precise and racy with each passing iteration and this is the finest Nocturne I have yet tasted. Lovely juice. I would love to be hanging out in a Parisian jazz club at midnight, sipping this wine in a dark corner and marveling at how fine the world can be when it turns its best face forward. 2020-2035+. **91.**

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

Taittinger’s “Nocturne” Rosé Sec has a different *cépages* from the non-Rosé bottling, as this wine is composed of a mix of thirty percent chardonnay, fifty percent pinot noir and twenty percent pinot meunier. Somewhere between twelve and fifteen percent of the blend is made up of still red wine and the finishing *dosage* is the same 17.5 grams per liter. The wine delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of strawberries, rhubarb, rye toast, a fine base of soil, plenty of smokiness and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, zesty acids and fine focus on the long and complex finish. The interplay of snappy acids and backend sweetness here is seamless and this is another late night sipping Champagne of impeccable quality. 2020-2035. **91.**

***Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs***

**Aurélien Suenen “Oiry” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Cramant)**

The new release of Oiry Blanc de Blancs from Aurélien Suenen is from the base year of 2017 and was disgorged in June of 2020, with a finishing *dosage* of three grams per liter. As is customary with Monsieur Suenen’s non-vintage bottlings, this wine includes reserve wines from the previous two vintages. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in an utterly refined blend of pear, apple, brioche, chalky minerality, incipient notes of *crème patissière* and a delicate topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully structured, with a rock solid core of fruit, stunning backend mineral drive, utterly refined *mousse* and a very long, nascently complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is a beautiful wine that is so well balanced out of the blocks that it is quite approachable, but the wine really deserves five to ten years in the cellar to grow into all its inherent beauty! 2020-2050. **93.**

**Aurélien Suenen “C & C” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Cramant)**

The current release of Aurélien Suenen’s “C & C” non-vintage Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut is also from the base year of 2017, and like the Oiry, always includes a percentage of the two previous years as well as reserve wines. The wine was disgorged in June of 2020 and finished this year with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The nose delivers a beautiful aromatic constellation of pear, tangerine, chalky minerality, warm bread, a touch of oak and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full, with a lovely core of fruit, superb soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and a long, focused and perfectly balanced finish. This seems a bit more buttoned up behind its lovely structure than the Oiry (at least right out of the blocks), and I would give this wine a bit of time in the cellar before expecting it to be wide open and drinking with generosity. And, it is too good of a young wine to be wasting bottles by drinking them before their time! 2023-2050+. **93.**



***Non-Vintage Brut and Extra Brut***  
**Florence Duchêne “Brut Réserve” NV (Cumières)**

Florence Duchêne came back to her family’s four hectare domaine, based in Cumières, in 2011, after working for an international wine marketing company for several years. The family has parcels in Cumières, as well as Aÿ, Hautvillers, Damery, Oeuilly, Vauciennes and Châtillon-sur-Marne. Madame Duchêne’s “Brut Réserve” is composed of a fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and pinot meunier, with the wine hailing from the base year of 2013 and has spent a minimum of five years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement, with a finishing *dosage* of six grams per liter. The *vins clairs* for this bottling do not go through malo. The wine offers up a refined bouquet of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, a hint of caraway seed, a lovely base of soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a lovely core of fruit, frothy *mousse* and fine length and grip on the complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is excellent Brut non-vintage from a producer who is completely new to me, but one I will plan on my next visit to Champagne! 2020-2040+. 91.

**Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Extra Brut NV (Damery)**

The newly arrived bottling of Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” from Fabrice Gass is from the base year of 2017 and was disgorged in the summer of 2020. The *cépages* is forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot meunier, as this wine is year in and year out, with one-third of the cuvée composed of reserve wine from 2016. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex and classy blend of white peach, apple, bread dough,

a superb base of soil, gentle smokiness, a hint of oak and just a touch of meunier floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a fine core of fruit, very elegant *mousse*, beautiful balance and grip and a long, complex and precise finish. Fabrice will normally finish this bottling with a *dosage* of four to five grams. This is a beautiful wine that is already drinking very well, but like all of the Alexandre Filaine bottlings, it is really meant to age and will be an even better drink a decade down the road. 2020-2050. **93+**.

**Gosset “Grande Réserve” Brut NV (Épernay)**

The current release of Gosset “Grande Réserve” is from the base year of 2015, with ten to twenty percent of the cuvée made up of reserve wines. This iteration has ended up with a *cépages* of forty-five percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir, coupled with ten percent of pinot meunier. It was disgorged in 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of 8.7 grams per liter. The wine delivers lovely aromatic complexity in its refined blend of apple, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones, caraway seed, a touch of hazelnut and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully focused, with a lovely core, elegant, tiny *mousse*, zesty acids and a long, complex and very precise and classy finish. This is excellent. 2020-2045. **92**.

**Gosset “Grand Blanc de Noirs” Extra Brut NV (Épernay)**

The Gosset “Grand Blanc de Noirs” non-vintage Extra Brut is a new bottling from this superb *maison* in Épernay. The wine is composed entirely of pinot noir, sourced from the villages of Aÿ, Ambonnay, Verzy, Tauxières and Chigny-lès-Roses. It is from the base year of 2008 and was disgorged in April of 2017, with a finishing *dosage* of five grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a beautiful blend of peach, sweet hazelnut, sourdough bread, a complex base of soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and perfectly balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, elegant *mousse* and lovely lift and cut on the long, complex and very refined finish. This is stellar juice! 2020-2050. **93+**.

**Gosset “12 Ans de Cave” Extra Brut NV (Épernay)**

This is a brand new cuvée from Champagne Gosset, which is from the base year of 2006. The *cépages* is fifty-one percent pinot noir and forty-nine percent chardonnay, with the blend augmented with eight percent of reserve wines. It was aged *sur latte* for twelve and a half years prior to disgorgement in December of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet is deep, complex and nicely refined with age, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, a refined base of chalky soil tones, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully resolved today, with a deep core of fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is drinking beautifully, but has decades and decades of life still ahead of it. Superb juice. 2020-2055+. **94**.

**Krug “Grand Cuvée” Brut NV “168<sup>ème</sup> Édition” (Reims)**

The new release of Krug Grande Cuvée “168<sup>ème</sup> Édition” is from the base year of 2012, with the reserve wines in the blend stretching all the way back to 1996. The final *cépages* has ended up as fifty-two percent pinot noir, thirty-five percent chardonnay and thirteen percent pinot meunier. Forty-two percent of the blend is made up of reserve wines in this beautiful iteration of Grande Cuvée. The bouquet is superb, wafting from the glass in a mosaic of apple, white peach, a touch of Clos du Mesnil-like fresh apricot, almond, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, fresh-baked bread, hints of the caraway seed to come and a whisper of buttery oak (which is particularly evident when the wine is first poured, but quickly is subsumed in the other elements on the nose). On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and very complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, utterly refined *mousse* and a long, perfectly

balanced and very energetic finish. This is one of the most effortless and seamlessly balanced young releases of Grande Cuvée in several years and is utterly brilliant wine. 2020-2080. **96+**.

**Krug “Grand Cuvée” Brut NV “158<sup>ème</sup> Édition” (Reims)**

This bottle has been in my cellar for more than a decade and is from the base year of 2002 and was retroactively designated by the team at Krug as the “158<sup>ème</sup> Édition”, though this did not appear on the label when the wine was first released. The wine is aging beautifully and is now wide open and drinking with great generosity, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of apple, nectarine, sweet hazelnut, caraway seed, a very complex base of soil, warm bread and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a superb core, lovely mineral drive and grip, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is really a splendid moment to be drinking this iteration of Grande Cuvée, though it still has decades of life ahead of it. 2020-2050. **96**.

**Savart “l’Ouverture” Extra Brut NV (Écueil)**

The l’Ouverture cuvée from Monsieur Savart is composed entirely from pinot noir grown in the village of Écueil, with half of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented and raised in cask and the other in tank. Only the reserve wines that go into the blend have gone through malo for this wine, which is aged under cork, rather than crown cap prior to disgorgement. This release was disgorged in September of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. It offers up a lovely nose of white peach, apple, *patissière*, chalky soil tones and a nice touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, good mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and lovely focus and balance on the long and youthful finish. This is a lovely bottle that will be even better with a few years in the cellar. 2021-2040+. **91+**.

**Savart “l’Accomplie” Vieilles Vignes Extra Brut NV (Écueil)**

The Savart “l’Accomplie” Vieilles Vignes bottling is composed from a *cépages* of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay. The *vins clairs* are again raised in a combination of casks and tank, with thirty percent of the blend made up of reserve wines from the previous two vintages. It was disgorged in September of 2020 and received a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and serious, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, peach, brioche, a touch of nutskin, a lovely base of soil tones and just a touch of buttery oak influence in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off a fine spine of acidity, with lovely focus and complexity, a rock solid core, frothy *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and impressive finish. This too deserves some additional bottle age to really blossom completely. It is already a lovely drink and will improve with further cellaring. Fine juice. 2021-2050. **93**.

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

The current release of Taittinger’s non-vintage Brut “la Française” is comprised of a *cépages* of forty percent chardonnay, thirty-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent pinot meunier. It is aged between three and four years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, so I suspect that this is from the base year of 2015. The wine offers up a bright and classy bouquet of apple, lemon, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the fairly complex finish. This is a very good iteration of Brut “la Française”. 2020-2040. **91**.

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

Taittinger’s les Folies de la Marquetterie is their single vineyard bottling, made from the steep vineyards that surround their Château de la Marquetterie in the village of Pierry. It was first produced in 2002. The current release is composed of a blend of fifty-five percent pinot noir and forty-five percent chardonnay, with a portion of the *vins clairs* now barrel-fermented and raised in casks. It is aged for five years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The current release offers up a bright and youthful bouquet of white peach, *patissière*, chalky soil tones, a hint of the passion fruit to come with bottle age, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a lovely core, good soil signature, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is still a fairly young wine and I would opt to tuck it away in the cellar for three to five years before drinking it in earnest, as it should blossom beautifully with a bit of bottle age. 2024-2055. **92+**.

### **Taittinger “Prélude” Grand Cru Brut NV (Reims)**

I have been a big fan of Taittinger’s “Prélude” Grand Cru bottling since its inception, and have quite a few bottles happily aging in my cellar. As this is a cuvée that is built for a long and graceful life in the cellar, I do wish the team at Taittinger would start marking at least the date of disgorgement on the back label, as I try to give my bottles at least five years of bottle age before I start drinking them, and if I do not remember to mark when I bought them before they go down in the cellar, they become a bit of a mystery as to their relative age. In any case, the bottling is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, all sourced from grand cru villages on the Montagne de Reims and the Côte des Blancs. The wine is aged *sur latte* at least five years prior to disgorgement, so I suspect the current release is from the base year of 2014. It is an exceptional young wine, offering up a precise and complex nose of apple, white peach, clementine, fresh-baked bread, a beautiful base of chalky minerality, gentle smokiness and a delicately floral topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely structured, with an excellent girdle of acidity, a rock solid core, excellent mineral drive, refined *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is approachable now, but five years down the road is when the fireworks are really going to start! 2021-2060. **94**.

### ***Non-Vintage Brut and Extra Brut Rosé***

#### **Gosset “Grand Rosé” Brut NV (Épernay)**

The current release of the excellent Gosset Grand Rosé is from the base year of 2013, with reserve wines from the 2012 vintage. It is composed from a *cépages* of fifty percent chardonnay and fifty percent pinot noir, with eight percent of this being still red wine. It was aged for four years *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a wide open and complex blend of strawberries, tangerine, rye toast, a lovely base of minerality, a delicate touch of spice tones and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, zesty and complex, with excellent mid-palate depth and mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is outstanding Brut Rosé! 2020-2045. **93**.

#### **Krug Rosé Brut NV “24<sup>ème</sup> Édition” (Reims)**

The Krug Rosé Brut “24<sup>ème</sup> Édition” is from the base year of 2012 and the wine is absolutely stunning on both the nose and palate. The wine includes reserves back to the 2006 vintage and ended up with a *cépages* of forty percent pinot noir, thirty-two percent pinot meunier and twenty-eight percent chardonnay. The wine this year includes eleven percent of its pinot noir component as still red wine from Aÿ, and the wine is quite a bit deeper in hue than is often the

case for a Krug Rosé. The bouquet is pure, precise and utterly refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of *fraises du bois*, a touch of rhubarb, blood orange, caraway seed, wheat toast, a gorgeous base of soil tones, discreet smokiness and a topnote of rose petal. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and flawlessly balanced, with a great core, refined *mousse*, bright acids and a long, complex and laser-like finish. I always love Krug Rosé, but this may well be my favorite iteration of this bottling I have ever had the pleasure to taste. 2020-2060+. **97.**

**Champagne Marguet “Shaman 16” Extra Brut Rosé NV (Ambonnay)**

Though I list this wine as a non-vintage Rosé, it is actually entirely from the base year of 2016. Benoît Marguet has actually produced two distinct versions of his Shaman 16 Rosé, with this bottling being the second release of the cuvée from the family cellars in the heart of Ambonnay. Benoît made this second version, which includes a bit of purchased fruit from a friend in Oger, that is grown organically, as the frost and mildew damage of 2016 had left him a bit short to cover all of his commitments for Shaman 16 Rosé. This bottling is composed of seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent pinot noir, with much of the chardonnay and all of the pinot noir still hailing from the Marguet vineyards in Ambonnay. The *vins clairs* were given an extended aging in cask until August of 2017, prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. The wine was disgorged in October of 2019 and finished non-*dosé*. It offers up a pale salmon color and a vibrant bouquet of tangerine, *fraises du bois*, a beautiful base of soil, gentle smokiness, citrus zest, a hint of oak and a discreet touch of upper register spice tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and zesty finish. Despite its lack of *dosage*, this wine’s lovely acids are buffered very nicely right out of the blocks. 2020-2035+. **92.**

**Savart “Bulles Rosé” Extra Brut NV (Écueil)**

Frédéric Savart’s “Bulles Rosé” is one of my absolute favorite non-vintage bottlings of Rosé in all of Champagne, as year in and year out, it is exceptional in quality. The wine’s *cépages* is seventy-eight percent pinot noir and twenty-two percent chardonnay, with eight percent of the pinot be still red wine. It was disgorged in June of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine is a beautiful salmon color and offers up a vivid bouquet of blood orange, pomegranate, violets, citrus peel, a gorgeous base of soil, lavender and a hint of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, precise and full, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive and grip, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the complex and still youthful finish. This wine is delicious right now, but will age impeccably well and will be an even better drink five years down the road. 2020-2045. **92+.**

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

**2014 Dhondt-Grellet “Les Nogers” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Flavigny)**

The Les Nogers *lieu à dit* lies in the premier cru village of Cuis and is planted with fifty year-old chardonnay vines. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented and given eight months of *elevage* on their fine lees prior to bottling. The wine was disgorged in December of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of 2.5 grams per liter. The bouquet is complex and very classy, offering up scents of pear, apple, almond, chalky minerality, gentle smokiness, fresh-baked bread and just a hint of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is still fairly youthful in personality, but is quite drinkable out of the blocks. Give it five to ten years in the cellar and it will be even better! Fine juice. 2020-2055. **93.**

#### **2014 Aurélien Suenen “Les Roberts” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Cramant)**

The Les Robert was Aurélien Suenen’s debut single vineyard bottling, as it was first crafted in the 2012 vintage. The *vins clairs* all go through full malo for this bottling and were aged nine months on their fine lees prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. The wine was aged *sur latte* just under five years prior to disgorgement in July of 2020 and finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. It offers up a precise and vibrant young bouquet of pear, tangerine, chalky minerality, white flowers, just a hint of buttery oak, incipient notes of *crème patissière* and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and a lovely blade of minerality today, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused and complex finish. I really like the backend tension of this wine at its two grams per liter of *dosage*, which makes it just a touch tensile today, but augurs very, very well for its future development. Give it some bottle age to really blossom, as it is going to be stellar. 2024-2065. **94+**.

#### **2014 Aurélien Suenen “La Coclulette” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Cramant)**

The *lieu à dit* of La Coclulette lies in the grand cru village of Oiry and Aurélien Suenen has a parcel of ninety-six year-old vines here! Eighty percent this parcel has a northerly exposition and only twenty percent faces south. Aurélien has fermented the wine with indigenous yeasts, given it nine months aging in cask on its fine lees prior to secondary fermentation and allowed it to age five years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. It was finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. The bouquet is deep, precise and supremely elegant, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, fresh almond, limestone minerality, incipient notes of pastry cream, spring flowers and just a whisper of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and laser-like in its focus, with a superb core of fruit, great mineral drive and grip, refined *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is truly stunning juice, which I would opt to age for another decade, but which is already pretty hard to resist in its youthful guise. Try to give it at least four or five years in the cellar! 2025-2065. **95**.

#### **2008 Taittinger “Comtes de Champagne” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims)**

The 2008 Taittinger “Comtes de Champagne” Blanc de Blancs is a beautiful young wine, with stunning precision on both the nose and palate, a serious girdle of acidity and stellar depth and mineral drive on the palate. This is not anywhere near as accessible and charming out of the blocks as the 2006 was at a similar point in its development, but there is even superior potential here for those with the patience to allow it to truly blossom with some further cellaring. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, pear, lemon zest, warm bread, chalky minerality, white lilies and just a whisper of buttery oak buried down deep. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a fine structure and grip, refined *mousse*, beautiful backend mineral drive and a long, complex and still quite youthful finish. This is a gorgeous wine in the making, but it is realistically still probably a good decade away from blossoming completely and drinking with a semblance of full maturity. 2028-2080. **97**.

#### **2004 Krug “Clos du Mesnil” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims)**

The 2004 vintage of Clos du Mesnil is a beautiful young wine. The wine displays a lovely and overt touch of fresh apricot that I have not tasted in any young vintage of Clos du Mesnil out of the blocks since the 1981 vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthful and complex constellation of apricot, apple, pear, a lovely base of limestone soil tones, brioche, a whisper of smokiness and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied

and very elegant in profile, with a lovely core, marvelous mineral drive and bounce, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This is simply stunning. 2020-2070+. 98.



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

#### **2016 Ponson Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime (Coulommès la Montagne)**

The 2016 vintage of Blanc de Noirs from Maxime Ponson is his first bottling composed entirely from pinot noir, and his first cuvée that he has produced beyond his excellent Brut non-vintage bottling. The fruit all hails from the *lieu à dit* of Maupas in the village of Coulommès, with fifty percent of the *vins clairs* raised in Stockinger *foudre* and the other half in stainless steel. It was disgorged in March of 2020 after three years *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The wine offers up a deep and classy nose of peach, apple, a touch of hazelnut, warm bread, a fine base of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a fine core, good mineral drive and bounce, elegant *mousse* and a long, very promising finish. This is approachable already, but really deserves at least a few years in the cellar to blossom more completely. Fine juice. 2023-2055. 92.

### **2015 Champagne Marguet “Les Crayères” Extra Brut Millésime (Ambonnay)**

The 2015 vintage of Les Crayères from Benoît Marguet is composed of a blend of fifty-eight percent chardonnay and forty-two percent pinot noir. The *vins clairs* were aged until July of 2016 in cask, prior to bottling for secondary fermentation. The wine was disgorged in April of 2020 and was finished non-*dosé* this year. It delivers lovely aromatic complexity on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, white peach, chalky minerality, sourdough bread, just a hint of buttery oak, fresh almond and a gentle floral note that suggests violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a rock solid core of fruit, refined *mousse*, excellent mineral drive and cut and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is an outstanding vintage of Les Crayères from Monsieur Marguet. It is quite approachable today for those who fancy low *dosage*, but for my palate, I would prefer to let it age a few years and allow that girdle of acidity to relax just a bit more. 2023-2055+. **94+**.

### **2015 Jean-Marc Sélèque “Soliste Pinot Noir” Extra Brut Millésime (Pierry)**

The 2015 Soliste Pinot Noir from Jean-Marc Sélèque was the one cuvée in his lineup of new releases that did not reach me before Issue 89 was sent out, but I was happy to receive it a few days later and taste it for this article. This bottling is made from a parcel of pinot noir planted in 1975 in the *lieu à dit* of les Gayères in Pierry, which features soils of flint and clay over the mother rock of limestone. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented and the wine was aged under cork, rather than crown cap, prior to its disgorgement in January of 2020, with a finishing *dosage* of 2.5 grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very classy blend of white apple, peach, hazelnut, a very complex base of soil tones, dried flowers and just a touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent soil undertow, refined *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and vibrant finish. This is lovely juice. 2023-2055. **92+**.

### **2014 Taittinger Brut Millésimé (Reims)**

The 2014 Taittinger Brut Millésimé is made from a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, with seventy percent of the grapes hailing from grand cru villages. The wine was aged five years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The nose wafts from the glass in a vibrant and youthful blend of lemon, apple, chalky minerality, bread dough, a nice touch of salinity and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a fine core, lovely mineral drive and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, zesty and nascently complex finish. This is approachable today, but it is still a young wine and four or five more years in the cellar will really allow the wine to blossom fully. A lovely vintage bottling from Taittinger. 2020-2045+. **92+**.

### **2012 Gosset “Grand Millésime” Brut (Épernay)**

The 2012 Gosset “Grand Millésime” is an outstanding example of this superb vintage. The *cépages* of the 2012 is sixty-seven percent chardonnay and thirty-three percent pinot noir, with the wine having been aged six-plus years *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in 2019. It was finished with a *dosage* this year of eight grams per liter. The very elegant bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, fresh-baked bread, a superb base of minerality and a topnote of gentle smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and vibrant finish. Like all Gosset wines, this is non-malo, which works so beautifully with the nicely ripe 2012

vintage to give a wine of both generosity and a steely spine of structure to carry it far, far into the future. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2060. **93+**.

### **2010 Champagne Marguet “Sapience” Extra Brut Millésime (Ambonnay)**

The new release of Benoît Marguet’s organic *Tête de Cuvée*, Sapience is from the 2010 vintage. This year the *cépages* is fifty percent chardonnay, thirty-three percent pinot meunier and seventeen percent pinot noir. Monsieur Marguet continues to purchase fruit for this bottling, with the chardonnay coming from David Léclapart, the pinot meunier from Vincent Laval and the pinot noir from Benoît Lahaye. The *vins clairs* were aged in barrel until July of 2011 and then the wine aged *sur latte* for more than nine years before it was disgorged in September of 2020. The wine saw no *dosage* this year. It offers up a beautifully complex and refined bouquet of apple, white peach, meunier floral notes, fresh-baked bread, a gorgeous base of complex soil tones, a bit of buttery oak, a touch of hazelnut and a discreetly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a superb girdle of acidity, utterly refined *mousse*, laser-like focus and a long, complex and impeccably balanced finish. This is a gorgeous bottle of bubbly, which is now starting to blossom nicely, but is really built for the long haul and will be even a finer drink a decade down the road! 2020-2060. **96**.

### **2004 Krug Brut Millésime (Reims)**

The 2004 Krug Brut Millésime is a superb example of the vintage. The *cépages* this year is thirty-nine percent chardonnay, thirty-seven percent pinot noir and twenty-four percent pinot meunier. It was aged twelve years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and preparation for market. The wine has been out now for more than a year and is really starting to blossom nicely, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of apple, pear, sourdough bread, a superb foundation of minerality, caraway seed and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a superb core of fruit, fine mineral drive and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, vibrant and complex finish. Some 2004s are in a slightly leaner phase of their development right now, but this is most emphatically not the case with the 2004 Krug, which is drinking very well indeed, despite it still being early on in its journey to complete maturity. 2020-2085. **96**.

### ***Vintage- Date Rosé***

#### **2015 Champagne Corbon “Les Bacchantes” Brut Rosé Saignée Millésime (Avize)**

Agnès Corbon’s 2015 Rosé de Saignée is composed entirely from pinot meunier, grown in the *lieu à dit* of Les Bacchantes in the village of Trélou-sur-Marne. It derived its beautiful cherry-salmon color from a brief period of maceration with the skins and was aged three and a half years *sur latte* prior to being disgorged in December of 2019. The wine offers up a beautiful bouquet of blood orange, rhubarb, a complex base of soil tones, a hint of rye bread and a lovely floral topnote redolent of lavender and rose. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and quite elegant in profile, with a good core, fine mineral drive and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and dancing finish. This is absolutely delicious and will age effortlessly, but good luck keeping your hands off of bottles in the cellar! 2020-2045. **93**.

#### **2015 Dhondt-Grellet “Le Mont de Fer” Rosé de Macération Extra Brut (Flavigny)**

The Le Mont de Fer Rosé de Macération from Dhondt-Grellet is composed entirely from pinot noir, made from a parcel of fifty-five year-old vines, from a parcel planted on clay soils over limestone. The grapes are foot-trodden, the *vins clairs* raised in tank for eight months prior

to bottling for secondary fermentation. The wine was disgorged in December of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The wine is a lovely ruby-salmon color and delivers a superb bouquet of cherries, rhubarb, clove-like spice tones, a lovely base of soil tones, rye bread and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and still youthful, with a superb core of fruit, good soil signature and cut, zesty acids, elegant *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and promising finish. This is a fine wine in the making, but to my palate, it could do with a few years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers to start to unfold. 2022-2050. **92.**



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

My case of the 2006 Pol Roger Brut Rosé has served me very well, but sadly, this is the next to last bottle from that dozen. The wine has been drinking beautifully from the moment I purchased it, but at age fourteen it is now clearly into its apogee. The wine offers up a refined and complex bouquet of cherries, blood orange, woodsmoke, chalky soil tones, rye bread, delicate spice tones and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and *à point*, with a fine core and mineral drive, elegant *mousse*, excellent balance and a long, complex and utterly refined finish. This still has plenty of life in it, but for my palate, it has reached its zenith and I cannot imagine it improving from this beautiful point of inflection. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2035. **94.**

**2006 Taittinger “Comtes de Champagne” Rosé Brut Millésime (Reims)**

It has been four years since I last opened a bottle of the 2006 Taittinger “Comtes de Champagne” Rosé and the wine has aged as beautifully as one would imagine. The bouquet now is pure, precise and beautifully evolved, offering up a complex nose of cherries, sweet cranberries, a fine base of chalky minerality, cinnamon stick, clove, a touch of orange peel and a gentle topnote of caraway seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely sense of weightless vinosity, a fine core and mineral drive, refined *mousse*, zesty acids and lovely balance and grip on the long and seamlessly energetic finish. Like so many other vintage Champagnes from 2006, the Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Rosé is now at a gorgeous place in its evolution and is drinking to perfection. 2020-2045+. **96.**

## RECENTLY-TASTED SPANISH WINES PART ONE WINTER 2020-2021



The first issue of the new year is usually where I begin my two part coverage on the wines of Spain and Portugal. However, this year, I received several samples early and thought that it made sense to do a little “down-payment” on the coming coverage of new releases on the wines from the Iberian Peninsula, as the samples in my cellar were currently in the market and might have already sold through by the time the next issue was ready to send out in late February. So, this article is quite short and only covers the new releases that arrived earlier than customary, so that the tasting notes do not need to wait in my files for an additional two months. Rest assured that a deeper and broader feature on Spanish and Portuguese wines is in the offing for coming issues and I will report more fully on the new vintages finding their way into the pipeline in that larger feature. But, in the interim, here are notes on several excellent new releases that are just emerging in the market as I write these notes. As my reports on wines from Spain and Portugal tend to be fairly long articles, this little preview also has the benefit of each individual tasting note not being buried amongst so many others in a longer feature.

Among these new releases are the very first wines I have encountered made in the beautiful Galician region of Valdeorras by the great Rioja estate of Cuné. The name of their new project in Valdeorras is Virgen Del Galir, and the wines I tasted from their new estate were

absolutely superb. Cuné purchased these vineyards back in 2002 and I am not sure if these new releases that I cover below are the first to be commercially released from the project, or just their first appearance in the US market. My assumption is that the team at Cuné spent several years getting a feel for their new vineyards and the wines that they would produce, but it is certainly possible that some of the Virgen Del Galir bottlings have already been made available within the Spanish market. I tasted a pair of very, very strong offerings from Virgen Del Galir for this article, but the *bodegas* is producing several additional cuvées beyond those which I tasted and based on how beautifully the first two wines showed, I have every intention of getting samples of the full range of wines here and reporting more fully on the lineup from the estate in the coming feature on Spain. I will also find out more about the project over the coming months and report more completely on it in a future article, but as I am typing this introduction over the course of the end of the year holiday season, I am not going to disturb anyone's well-earned Christmas and New Year's respite to ask questions- particularly after the year all of us have had to endure in 2020!

### ***Ribeiro Blanco***

#### **2019 Casal de Armán Blanco- Bodegas Casal de Armán**

The 2019 Casal de Armán Blanco is made principally from Treixadura, with five percent each of Albariño and Godello co-planted in the vineyards. The *élevage* is done in stainless steel for nine months prior to bottling. The bouquet is bright and inviting, offering up scents of tart orange, green olive, salty, stony soil tones and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is vibrant, medium-full and zesty, with a good core and soil signature, lovely acids and a long, bouncy and complex finish. This is very tasty! 2020-2028. **90.**

#### **2019 Eira Dos Mouros Blanco- Bodegas Casal de Armán**

The 2019 Eira Dos Mouros Blanco from Bodegas Casal de Armán is pure Treixadura, with the wine fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks. The wine is excellent on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of green apple, limepeel, granite, a touch of green olive and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is vibrant, complex and full-bodied, with a lovely core, fine stony undertow, bright acids and a long, focused and very classy finish. This is really lovely in 2019 and an absolute steal for the price! 2020-2028. **91.**

#### **2017 Finca Misenhora Blanco- Bodegas Casal de Armán**

The 2017 Finca Misenhora Blanco from Casal de Armán is a vineyard selection, made from this relatively high altitude vineyard, planted on a combination of granite, slate and sandy topsoils. The wine is ninety percent Treixadura and five percent each of Albariño and Godello. Unlike the Finca Os Loureiros bottling, this wine does not see any oak and is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel, to give a quite different expression to the vineyard. The wine offers up a beautiful bouquet of green apple, green olive, salty minerality, a touch of lime peel, dried flowers and a touch of Chablis-like straw tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and complex, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive, zesty acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Just a beautiful bottle. 2020-2035. **93.**

#### **2017 Finca Os Loureiros Blanco- Bodegas Casal de Armán**

The Finca Os Loureiros is a single vineyard bottling from Bodegas Casal de Armán, with these terraced vineyards planted to a mix of ninety percent Treixadura and the remaining ten percent a blend of Albariño and Godello. The wine is barrel-fermented and aged in five hundred liter *demi-muids* for six months prior to bottling and then given nearly another year of bottle

aging prior to release. The 2017 Finca Os Loureiros offers up a refined nose of pear, lemon peel, a touch of olive, salty minerality, a touch of menthol and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and gently new oaky in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature and bounce and a long, very well-balanced finish. This is drinking beautifully today, but has the structure to also age long and gracefully. Fine juice. 2020-2035. **91+**.

### ***Ribeiro Tinto***

#### **2018 Casal de Armán Tinto- Bodegas Casal de Armán**

The 2018 Casal de Armán Tinto is composed of a blend of Sousón, Caiño Longo and Brancellao. The bunches are destemmed and the wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks prior to bottling. It offers up a lovely, black fruity nose of dark berries, a bit of tree bark, woodsmoke, chicory and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a good core and soil signature, modest tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is juicy and has no rough edges and is drinking very well out of the blocks. Great value! 2020-2030+. **89**.

#### **2018 Eira Dos Mouros Tinto- Bodegas Casal de Armán**

The 2018 Eira Dos Mouros Tinto is crafted from a blend of fifty percent Sousón, forty percent Caiño Longo and ten percent Brancellao. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet of cassis, dark berries, coffee bean, granitic soil tones, bonfire and a lovely touch of Chartreuse-like botanicals. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and complex, with good mid-palate depth, lovely mineral drive and just a touch of backend tannin perking up the long finish. This seems to have a bit more mineral undertow to it than the 2018 Casal de Armán Tinto, which gives it a slight nod in my book, but both wines are excellent value! 2020-2030+. **91**.

### ***Valdeorras Blanco***

#### **2018 Regueirón Godello- Virgen Del Galir**

Virgen Del Galir is the new Valdeorras project from the great Rioja estate of Cuné. The project was launched in 2002 and the team here now farms fully twenty hectares of vines. Their Godello from the terraced Regueirón vineyard (slate and loam soils) is fermented with indigenous yeasts in a combination of older casks and cement vats. The 2018 version is excellent, offering up a bright and youthful bouquet of lemon, pear, beeswax, stony minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, bright acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is first class Godello! 2020-2035+. **93**.

### ***Valdeorras Tinto***

#### **2018 A Villeira- Virgen Del Galir**

The A Villeira single vineyard bottling from Virgen Del Galir is composed primarily of Mencía, with the terraced vineyards planted on granitic soils. The vines were planted in 1958 and include a small percentage of Garnacha Tintorera, Brancellao, Merenzao and Sousón as part of the field blend that was planted with the Mencía. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, undergoes its malolactic fermentation in used five hundred liter *demi-muids* and then was raised in the same larger casks for one year prior to bottling. The 2018 A Villeira offers up a bright and complex nose of dark berries, pepper, a touch of licorice, a fine base of granitic soil tones, gamebird, woodsmoke and a nice touch of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the

wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent in personality, with a fine core of black fruit, tangy acids, ripe tannins and a long, focused and complex finish of beautiful balance. This is a young wine that is built for the cellar and deserves several years of hibernation before drinking, but it is going to be a stellar bottle in due course! This is an excellent new addition to the firmament of superb Valdeorras wines! 2025-2055+. **93+**.

### ***Rioja Blanco***

#### **2019 Rioja Blanco- Alegre Valgañón**

The 2019 Rioja Blanco from Oscar Alegre and Eva Valgañón is comprised of a blend of ninety percent Viura and ten percent Garnacha Blanca, with the wine aged for a year in used *demi-muids*. The wine offers up a beautiful young bouquet of tart pear, bread fruit, raw almond, very salty soil tones, a touch of iodine and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak from the older casks. On the palate the wine is bright, young and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, a hint of natural wine wildness to it on the backend, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This could do with a bit of bottle age to blossom fully. 2022-2045. **90**.

#### **2018 Rioja Blanco- Alegre Valgañón**

The 2018 Rioja Blanco from Alegre Valgañón is aging beautifully and is now starting to really open up on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pear, a hint of orange peel, raw almond, salty minerality, a touch of lemongrass and a nice framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and racy, with a superb core of fruit, good soil signature, a fine girdle of acidity and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. I do not get any sense of the natural wine fragility that the 2019 currently displays in a very modest fashion. This is already starting to drink very nicely, but it has an excellent structure and should prove to be quite long-lived in the cellar. 2020-2050. **92**.

#### **2015 Rioja Blanco “Capellanía” Reserva- Marqués de Murrieta**

The 2015 Rioja Blanco “Capellanía” Reserva from Marqués de Murrieta is composed entirely of Viura and is aged for fifteen months in new French casks prior to bottling. The wine is fairly new oaky on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, fresh almond, a hint of fresh pineapple, acacia blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a lovely core of fruit, a fine girdle of acidity, plenty of new oak and a long, nascently complex and well-balanced finish. This wine has the stuffing to eventually carry its new oak component quite well, but it is still a young wine and right now the new oak still sticks out a bit on the backend, so give this wine a bit more cellaring time to allow it to better integrated its wood. All of the constituent components here are excellent, but the oak is just a bit obtrusive at the present time. I would love to see this bottling raised in used barrels exclusively in the future, as I think it would still show a nice touch of vanilla from the French oak and not require time to integrate the wood. 2022-2045+. **92**.



## ***Rioja Tinto***

### **2018 Rioja- Alegre Valgañón**

The 2018 Rioja from Alegre Valgañón is composed of eighty percent Tempranillo and twenty percent Garnacha. The wine offers up a ripe and classy bouquet of raspberries, Rioja spice tones of clove and cinnamon, cigar smoke, a nice base of soil tones and plenty of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a good core of fruit, fine nascent complexity and a long, moderately tannic finish. Oscar Alegre and Eva Valgañón have traditionally utilized used French *barricas* and *demi-muids* to raise this bottling in, so I am surprised at how much the oak is showing on both the nose and palate right now in this wine. Perhaps they had to buy some new casks to expand the cellar capacity for this vintage? The wine seems to have a fine potential for cellaring, but this vintage seems quite a bit more new oaky in personality to me than previous iterations of this bottling. 2026-2055+. 90+.

### **2018 Rioja Garnacha- Alegre Valgañón**

This is a limited bottling made from a one hundred year-old Garnacha vineyard planted in the township of Cárdenas. The 2018 includes twenty-five percent whole clusters, with the wine fermented in *foudre* and aged in a pair of five hundred liter *demi-muids*. It is bottled unfinned and unfiltered. It delivers a lovely and very refined nose of strawberries, raspberries, a hint of beetroot, beautifully discreet spice tones, a hint of meatiness, a superb base of salty soil elements, pepper and a hint of celery salt in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a superb core of red fruit, lovely mineral undertow and

grip, ripe, firm tannins and a long, complex and focused finish. This is a beautiful bottle of garnacha, with the very old vines giving the wine a bit of creaminess in the mid-palate and superb transparency from beginning to end on the palate. This will need some time in the cellar to soften up its tannins, but it will be a stellar bottle when it is ready to drink. 2028-2065+. **94.**

#### **2018 Rioja “Carra Santo Domingo”- Alegre Valgañón**

The 2018 Rioja “Carra Santo Domingo” from Alegre Valgañón is a lovely wine with its Garnacha component defining the wine on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of raspberries, spices meats, *garrigue*, stony soil tones and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven in personality, with a fine core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and spicy finish. This is fine, fine juice, with a real sense of elegance of garnacha. 2028-2060. **93.**

#### **2018 Rioja “La Calleja”- Alegre Valgañón**

The 2018 Rioja “La Calleja” bottling from Oscar Alegre and Eva Valgañón is composed entirely from Tempranillo, from a one hectare plot that Eva planted with her father back in 1992, when she was still a young girl. The couple first started bottling this wine on its own in 2010, but did not produce it in 2011, 2012 or 2013. The wine includes thirty percent whole clusters and is raised in five hundred liter *demi-muids*, with one-third new oak and the other two thirds composed of one and two wine vessels. As it is raised in *demi-muids*, it is not entitled to be labeled as either Reserva or Gran Reserva, as the casks are too large to qualify by Rioja regulations. In any event, the 2018 is an excellent young wine, delivering a bright and nascently complex bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, Rioja spice tones, a hint of the nutskin to come, a gorgeous base of salty soil tones, cigar smoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and beautifully transparent in personality, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, firm tannins, good acids and a long, focused and very, very promising finish. This is light on its feet, but loaded with intensity of flavor and will be very complex when it is ready to drink. 2028-2065. **93+.**

#### **2016 Rioja “Dalmau”- Marqués de Murrieta**

The Rioja “Dalmau” from Marqués de Murrieta is composed of an old vine blend of eighty-two percent Tempranillo, fifteen percent Cabernet Sauvignon and three percent Graciano, all from the same parcel that was planted in 1950. The wine is raised for just under two years in new French oak casks. The 2016 Dalmau offers up a deep, sappy and modern bouquet of black cherries, cigar smoke, a hint of clove, balsamic tones and plenty of toasty new French oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly succulent in style, with a ripe and velvety attack, plenty of sappiness at the core, firm tannins (some derived from the oak) and a long, plush and slightly warm finish. This comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane, but to my palate it is probably a bit closer to fifteen percent, as it is quite ripe and shows its alcohol a touch on the backend. The oak seems likely to eventually be absorbed by the copious levels of fruit here, but right now, it is not integrated and there are some dry-edged wood tannins on the backend that need to be worked through. It is very well-made in its quite modern style and others may well be absolutely dazzled by this wine. Me? Put me down as agnostic (but, add five points to my score if this is up your stylistic alley). 2025-2055. **88.**

#### **2015 Rioja Reserva- Marqués de Murrieta**

Marqués de Murrieta’s 2015 Rioja Reserva is composed of a blend of eighty percent Tempranillo, twelve percent graciano, six percent mazuelo and two percent garnacha. The wine is aged for eighteen months in American oak casks prior to bottling. The wine is lovely and

expressive on the nose, delivering scents of red and black raspberries, cigar ash, cloves, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, a hint of the nutskin to come and plenty of smoky American oak. On the palate the wine is ripe, pure, full-bodied and still fairly youthful, with a good core, excellent soil signature and grip, firm, chewy tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is approachable today, but still a puppy and I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for at least another five years and let its tannins soften up more completely. It will be very long-lived and truly lovely in due course. 2025-2065+. **92.**

### **2011 Rioja “Viña Cubillo”- López de Heredia**

The 2011 Viña Cubillo from López de Heredia is another really lovely bottle of Rioja, once again arguing that this is one of the very finest value to be found in the entire region. The bouquet is deep, complex and utterly classical in personality, wafting from the glass in a lovely and impressively complex blend of red and black raspberries, cigar wrapper, clove, a superb base of soil, a touch of eucalyptus, coconutty American oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with the first vestiges of velvety texture emerging on the attack, a fine core and soil signature, buried tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. This is very, very good Rioja! 2020-2050. **92.**

### **2009 Rioja “Castillo Ygay” Gran Reserva Especial- Marqués de Murrieta**

The 2009 vintage of Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial from Marqués de Murrieta is composed of a blend of eighty-one percent Tempranillo and nineteen percent Mazuelo. The wine was aged twenty-six months in American casks prior to bottling. The wine is quite black fruity out of the blocks (eleven years of age is toddler age for Castillo Ygay!), offering up a lovely and still fairly primary bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, cigar wrapper, a touch of aged *balsamico*, gentle notes of clove, a beautifully complex base of salty soil tones, nutskin, just a hint of celery salt and a lovely foundation of slightly spicy American oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and velvety, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, buried, moderate tannins and a very long, complex and classy finish. Castillo Ygay ages almost forever, so it seems sacrilege to suggest that this wine is drinking beautifully at age eleven, but it is really delicious already. That said, the bouquet shows that the wine still is only in its primary stage of complexity and will be far more complex if patience is exercised and the wine given another decade or two in the cellar. Fine, fine juice! 2020-2100. **94+.**

### **2008 Rioja “Viña Tondonia” Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 2008 Viña Tondonia Reserva is an absolute classic in the making. At age twelve the wine is still a puppy, and though very, very easy to drink now, it has still not developed any of its secondary layers of complexity that will arrive with further bottle age. The supremely refined nose delivers scents of black cherries, black raspberries, cigar smoke, a lovely array of Rioja spice tones, a touch of meatiness, a complex base of soil and a lovely foundation of oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with lovely soil signature and grip, suave, fine-grained tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. To my palate, this beautiful wine deserves at least another six to eight years in the cellar before drinking, as there is still a lot to unfold here with the fullness of time. But, it is so perfectly balanced today that I fully expect to see a significant percentage of the bottles not make it that long! 2026-2075. **93+.**

***Costers del Serge (Cataluña)***

**2018 Gotim Bru- Castell Del Remei**

The 2018 Gotim Bru from Castell Del Remei is comprised of a blend of thirty-five percent each of Garnaxta and Tempranillo and fifteen percent each of Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon. The four varieties are harvested and fermented separately and then blended and aged in two hundred and twenty-five liter casks prior to bottling. The 2018 comes in listed at 14.1 percent octane and offers up scents of cassis, grilled game, fresh herb tones, a touch of pepper, chalky soil tones and smoky oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and suavely tannic, with tangy acids, good focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and gently peppery finish from the Garnaxta in the blend. This is a touch reductive when first opened, so benefits from a bit of decanting before serving, but once it opens up, it is a very good bottle. 2020-2035. **89.**

***Canary Islands Blanco***

**2018 Táganan Blanco- Envínate**

I somehow missed this bottle of 2018 Táganan Blanco from Envínate in my cellar when I was writing up my last feature on the wines of Spain, so it is probably a bit late getting published. Hopefully, the wine is still in the market, as it is excellent in 2018, offering up a bright, deep and complex bouquet of bread fruit, rosemary, lemongrass, volcanic soil tones, a touch of walnut and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very complex, with a lovely core, superb backend mineral drive and a long, poised and vibrant finish. Really lovely wine. 2020-2035. **92.**

## RECENTLY-TASTED RHÔNE WINES PART TWO DECEMBER 2020



*October sunshine gracing down on the beautiful vineyards of Côte-Rôtie.*

As I generally only write about Rhône Valley wines once each year, I was not about to turn down any late-arriving samples from this fine region, especially given how difficult getting containers out of France and into the US has become with the multiple complications brought upon by the current US administration's higher tariffs and the never-ending global pandemic. So, when a couple of importers told me that their containers were being delayed out of France in the autumn and would not arrive in time for the release of Issue 89, I quickly told them I would be more than happy to taste their wines once they had landed in the US and just put together a Round Two on the Rhône to include in Issue 90. And here we are. One of the producers whose wines I was keen to taste when they arrived was Pierre Rostaing, who is just releasing his 2018s. As readers may recall, starting in the 2016 vintage, Pierre and his father René decided to expand the family domaine's lineup of single vineyard bottlings, producing both an example of La Viallière and Côte Brune, to augment their already long-established cuvées of Côte Blonde and La Landonne. In the 2018 vintage, there will be a Côte Brune released again (as it was also in 2017), but it is in very short supply (all of sixty bottles came to the Rostaings' US importer), so I did not taste it for this report. The La Viallière bottling may not ultimately make it into

commercial channels at all in the 2018 vintage, as much of this cuvée is based on the more than one hundred year-old *petite serine* vines that René Rostaing's uncle, Albert Dervieux, bequeathed to the domaine when he retired in 1990. The yields from these centenarian-plus vines always fluctuates wildly and in the heat of the summer of 2018, they produced a very meager quantity of grapes. At the time of this writing, it seems likely that all of the 2018 La Viallière will be bottled in magnums and retained for the family cellar, as Pierre Rostaing has had a child born in this year and it would be a nice little cache of birth year magnums for the next generation of the Rostaing family to drink over the course of their lifetimes.

Another of the very top Côte-Rôtie estates has pared back their lineup of single vineyard bottlings as well in the 2018 vintage. Domaine Barge in Ampuis is also reining in their single vineyard lineup, though not for the same reasons as the Rostaing family. Julien Barge is unveiling a new cuvée in 2018, which he has named "Les Côtes" which will have to effectively replace the domaine's bottlings of Côte Brune, Côte Blonde and La Combard. The Les Côtes bottling from Julien Barge is being created, due to the family domaine losing the lease on a significant parcel of vines that they had farmed in the famed *lieu à dit* of Côte Brune, which belongs to a cousin who is now going to sell the grapes to a different domaine in Ampuis. As a result, Julien will no longer have enough production from the Côte Brune to make a cuvée solely from this vineyard and has decided to now blend his little bit of remaining Côte Brune fruit with his production from both Côte Blonde (which has always been quite small) and La Combard in order to make a proper-sized cuvée, which he has renamed Les Côtes. So moving forward (unless the cousin one day comes to his or her senses and starts sharing their production again with Domaine Barge), the Les Côtes will now be the one of two bottlings of Côte-Rôtie produced by the Barge family, joining their lovely Cuvée du Plessy. I am sorry to see Domaine Barge lose vines in the beautiful vineyard of Côte Brune, as I really liked their example from this fabled *terroir* and they have not been producing it on its own for all that many vintages to start with. But, at least the 2018 Les Côtes is a truly exceptional young bottle of Côte-Rôtie (see below) and will eventually take its rightful place as one of the most sought after bottlings in the appellation.

This second round of reporting on the wines from the Rhône Valley also allowed me to taste the new releases from one of my favorite estates in the southern half of the region, Château Mont-Redon in Châteauneuf du Pape. Pierre Fabre and the rest of his family has been able to add to the Mont-Redon lineup in recent times and I was very excited to see that the estate is now producing an excellent example of Gigondas (made from purchased fruit) to augment their tradition lineup here from the Côtes-du-Rhône, Lirac and Châteauneuf du Pape. There was also an additional surprise to the Mont-Redon lineup of samples sent to me this year, as the estate has just begun bottling a very special old vine cuvée of Châteauneuf du Pape which they call "Le Plateau de Mont-Redon". This wine is made from the very first parcels of vines planted when the family purchased Mont-Redon back in 1923, from a superb plot of very stony soils planted solely to syrah and grenache when the estate was first starting its journey of recovery back from the devastation of phylloxera. The Le Plateau bottling will only be produced in "great vintages", with the 2016 being the first one ever produced and I was delighted to receive a bottle to taste. It is truly a brilliant young Châteauneuf du Pape and a wonderful new addition to the firmament in the region.

Beyond the new releases from Mont-Redon, this report also has a broader range of new releases from several other producers in Châteauneuf du Pape, as the late autumn containers into the docks of New York from France included the current bottlings from iconic estates such as Bosquet des Papes, Château Fortia, Clos des Papes, Le Vieux Donjon and several others, so this report has notes on quite a few important new releases from the southern half of the valley. I should also mention that I had the chance to taste a new (to me) estate from Vacqueyras that I was quite impressed with, Domaine les Semelles de Vent, who produce Gigondas, Vacqueyras and a tiny bit of Châteauneuf du Pape made entirely from mourvèdre. I did not taste the Châteauneuf du Pape, but two vintages of their Gigondas and one of their Vacqueyras were all excellent in quality. In addition, each label has a new, original painting on it done by the proprietor, which makes these excellent wines even more fun at the table, as one gets to enjoy these whimsical paintings along with the wines. Further expanding my horizons for this report, in Saint-Joseph, I had a chance to taste my first wines from Bastien Jolivet, who took over for his father a handful of years ago at the head of the family domaine and is making excellent wines. Domaine Jolivet is based in the village of St. Jean de Muzols, right in the heart of the Saint-Joseph appellation and next door to the well-known town of Mauves (home to the Gonon and Chave families). This report also includes the new releases from the Grippa family as well, who along with Domaines Gonon and Trollat have helped define Saint-Joseph excellence for several generations.

So, despite the relative brevity of this report (which follows hard on the heels of the last article on the Rhône Valley in Issue 89), it covers quite a few real gems from the region. The tasting notes are listed in the same order as was the case in the last issue's report on the region, with the appellations listed from south to north.

### ***Collines Rhodaniennes Rouge***

#### **2018 La Chevalière- Domaine Patrick Jasmin (Collines Rhodaniennes)**

The La Chevalière bottling from Patrick Jasmin is produced from a plot of syrah vines which he planted in 1995, after taking over from his father Robert manning the helm of the family domaine in Côte-Rôtie. These vines lie just south of the Côte-Rôtie appellation, planted down by the Rhône River on sandy soils and include one percent of viognier, with the wine raised in casks previously used for the family's Côte-Rôtie bottling. The 2018 is lovely, offering up a bright and complex nose of black raspberries, smoked meats, black olive, pepper, a nice base of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, modest tannins and a long, complex finish. This is very good wine and a fine value! 2020-2030. **90.**

### ***Côtes-du-Rhône and Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages Rouge***

#### **2018 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages St.-Maurice "Echevin" - Domaine La Florane**

The 2018 St.-Maurice "Echevin" from Domaine La Florane is composed of a blend of ninety percent syrah and ten percent grenache, with the vineyard sitting at four hundred meters above sea level and enjoying a northerly exposition. The wine includes some whole clusters and is raised in a fifty-fifty combination of cement vats and older *demi-muids* for fifteen months prior to bottling. The bouquet offers up a deep and smoky nose of dark berries, grilled meats, pepper, tapenade, a fine base of soil and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and shows off fine mid-palate depth, with ripe tannins, fine focus and grip

and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is a fine bottle in the making, but it starts out life a bit chewy and I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for a year or two, just to let it soften up a bit more on the backend. It will age long and gracefully. 2022-2040. **90.**

**2018 Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages St.-Maurice “Guillaume de Rouville” - Domaine La Florane**

The Guillaume de Rouville bottling from François and Adrien Fabre at Domaine La Florane is a vineyard selection of the finest parcels and oldest vines in their vineyards that also produced their Echevin cuvée. The *cépages* of the 2018 version is ninety-five percent syrah and five percent grenache, with the wine fermented in oak vats and aged in a combination of older *demi-muids* and *foudres* for eighteen months before bottling. The 2018 Guillaume de Rouville is an excellent wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of black raspberry, cassis, pepper, black olive, a nice touch of chalky soil tones, woodsmoke and a bit of spit-roasted game. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, ripe tannins and a long, vibrant and complex finish. Stylistically, this reminds me a bit of the Fonsalette Syrah bottlings I used to drink with regularity back in the decade of the 1980s, when they were still a well-kept secret. This is an excellent wine. 2025-2050. **92.**

***Lirac***

**2018 Lirac- Château Mont-Redon**

The bottling of Lirac from Château Mont-Redon is always one of my favorite values in the southern Rhône and the 2018 has again, turned out very nicely indeed. The wine is comprised of a blend of seventy percent grenache, twenty percent syrah and ten percent mourvèdre, grown in soils quite similar to Châteauneuf du Pape. The 2018 Lirac comes in listed at 14.5 percent alcohol and offers up a bright and complex bouquet of red and black raspberries, pepper, roasted meats, a fine base of stony soil tones and just a hint of fruitcake in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, focused and classy finish. This is excellent wine and a fine, fine value! 2020-2035. **90.**

***Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc***

**2019 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc- Château Mont-Redon**

The 2019 Châteauneuf du Pape Blanc from Château Mont-Redon is composed of its customary blend of grenache blanc, roussanne, picpoul, clairette and bourboulenc; the wine comes in at fourteen percent octane in this vintage. It offers up a lovely bouquet of lemon, crab apple, chalky soil tones, white flowers and orange peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, fine chalky soil signature and very nice framing acids keeping the wine light on its feet on the long finish. This is lovely. 2020-2030+. **90.**

***Châteauneuf du Pape Rouge***

**2018 Châteauneuf du Pape “Cuvée Tradition”- Bosquet des Papes**

The 2018 vintage of Cuvée Tradition from Bosquet des Papes is composed of a blend of seventy-five percent grenache, eleven percent syrah, ten percent mourvèdre and the final few percent made up of a field blend of other grapes. The wine is aged in a combination of *foudres*, *demi-muids* and tank for a year, prior to bottling. The 2018 Cuvée Tradition offers up a bright and classic nose of red and black raspberries, a bit of fruitcake, pepper, *garrigue*, a fine base of soil tones and a touch of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied

and nicely soil-driven, with fine focus and grip, ripe, firm tannins and a bit of backend heat sticking out on the long and nascently complex finish. This comes in listed at fifteen percent, and I quite like its vibrancy and transparency down to the soil, but it is a big boy and carries plenty of octane, so it is not for the faint at heart. But, despite its hefty octane, it is really quite nicely balanced and I can imagine it aging quite gracefully, though always being a bit warm on the backend. In its more powerful style, it is impeccably well-made. 2026-2055+. 90+.



### 2018 Châteauneuf du Pape- Clos des Papes

The Avril family farms thirty-five hectares of vines in the appellation, with four devoted to their white wine and the remainder to their Châteauneuf du Pape *rouge*. Paul Vincent Avril, the current proprietor, chooses to de-stem prior to fermentation in stainless steel tanks and raises his wine in old *foudres* for fifteen months prior to bottling, unfiltered. The 2018 Châteauneuf du Pape from Clos des Papes is its customary *cépages* of sixty-five percent grenache, twenty percent mourvèdre, ten percent syrah and five percent of other grapes, such as counoise, muscardin and vaccarèse. The wine offers up a fine aromatic constellation of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, hints of the fruitcake to come, a complex base of soil, bonfire and *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, buried tannins and a long, well-balanced and quite discreetly warm finish. This is first class Châteauneuf du Pape, and with it having been completely destemmed, it will drink very well with only a handful years in the cellar, though will age very well indeed. 2024-2060. 92+.

### **2018 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine la Consonnière**

This was the first wine I had ever tasted from Domaine la Consonnière. This is not surprising, as Sébastien Cuscusa only started this domaine in 2009. Monsieur Cuscusa hired consultant Philippe Cambie to oversee farming of the domaine's five hectares of vineyards and assist with the winemaking decisions. The vineyards are on sandy soil sand planted almost entirely to very old grenache, with a great many over one hundred years of age. There are very small amounts of mourvèdre and clairette rosé also planted here, which are blended into the single red wine produced at Domaine la Consonnière. The wine is fermented in cement vats and raised in a combination of these same vats and older *demi-muids* for twenty-two months, prior to bottling. The 2018 comes in listed at fourteen percent octane (which may be a touch understated) and offers up a vibrant and classic nose of red and black raspberries, roasted venison, pepper, fruitcake, bonfire, a wide array of spices and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a fine core of old vine fruit, good soil signature and grip, ripe, chewy tannins and impressive focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This is an excellent bottle of Châteauneuf du Pape in the making, but give it some bottle age to soften up on the backend. 2028-2055+. **93.**

### **2018 Châteauneuf du Pape- Le Vieux Donjon**

Le Vieux Donjon has a lot of old vines, with fully a third of their seventeen hectares of organically-farmed, red grape varieties are more than one hundred years of age! Most of these are very old grenache vines. The estate only makes a single bottling of Châteauneuf du Pape *rouge*, so the old vines form a formidable foundation for this wine. The 2018 Châteauneuf du Pape from Le Vieux Donjon is composed of a blend of seventy-five percent grenache, ten percent each of syrah and mourvèdre and five percent cinsault. The estate uses a significant percentage of whole clusters and ferments in cement tanks; *élevage* is done for a year in a half, with eighty percent of the cuvée raised in old *foudres* and twenty percent in cement vats. The wine offers up a deep and meaty nose of dark berries, hung game, pepper, *garrigue*, woodsmoke, a nice touch of sweet stems and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, complex and well-balanced finish that shows just a trace of backend heat. This comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and that seems just about right for this wine; it should age very nicely. 2026-2060. **92+.**

### **2017 Châteauneuf du Pape “Tradition”- Château Fortia**

The 2017 Châteauneuf du Pape “Tradition” bottling from Château Fortia is quite unique in its *cépages*, due to flowering issues with the grenache in this growing season, so the wine has ended up being composed of a blend of forty-five percent each of grenache and mourvèdre, coupled with ten percent syrah. The normal *cépages* here for the Tradition is eighty percent grenache and twenty percent syrah. The 2017 is a hefty boy, tipping the scales at 15.5 percent alcohol. It offers up a deep and quite black fruity nose from the higher percentage of mourvèdre this year, wafting from the glass in a blend of dark berries, hung game, pepper, woodsmoke, a touch of fruitcake and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and remarkably well-balanced for its octane level, with a good core of fruit, good soil undertow, firm, chewy tannins and a long, complex and moderately warm finish. I am really quite surprised how civilized this wine is for 15.5 percent, as it is not jammy, but quite precise on both the nose and palate, shows good soil signature and really carries its alcohol fairly well. It is not a classic vintage of the Tradition bottling here, due to the issues with *coulure* in the grenache and the extreme drought conditions of the vintage, but it has really turned out very well, given the

challenges of the year. That said, one does have to still have a pretty strong tolerance to alcohol to really appreciate the wine properly and it will not be for everyone. 2028-2050+. **91**.

### **2017 Châteauneuf du Pape “Cuvée de Baron”- Château Fortia**

The Cuvée de Baron from Château Fortia was only begun here in the 2001 vintage and normally is comprised of a blend of fifty percent grenache, forty-five percent syrah and five percent mourvèdre. However, due to the challenges of 2017, the *cépages* this year includes ten percent more mourvèdre and only thirty-five percent syrah, to augment the fifty percent grenache. This bottling is aged entirely in old *foudres*, and the 2017 Cuvée de Baron also tips the scales at 15.5 percent because of the drought. The quite black fruity bouquet offers up an impressively precise and complex nose of black raspberries, pepper, roasted meats, a touch of *garrigue*, tree bark, bonfire and a good foundation of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and again, quite well-balanced for such a high octane level, with a fine core of fruit, good soil undertow, chewy tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. As is the case with the Tradition, this is a bit higher in alcohol for my own personal palate, but for those who do not mind this level, the wine is very, very well-made. 2028-2050+. **91+**.

### **2017 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château Mont-Redon**

The Châteauneuf du Pape from Château Mont-Redon is normally made from a *cépages* of sixty percent grenache, thirty percent syrah and ten percent made up varying amounts of mourvèdre, muscardin, counoise, vaccarèse and cinsault. However, with the cold spring that adversely affected the grenache because of *coulure*, the overall yields in Mont-Redon's vineyards were down fully fifty percent in 2017 and this wine has a far lower percentage of grenache than is customary. As has been the case for several years, half of the cuvée is raised in older Burgundy casks and half in *foudres* for eighteen months prior to blending and bottling. Due to the changes in *cépages* of the 2017, this is much more black fruity than usual on the nose, offering up a complex mix of dark berries, roasted meats, coffee, lovely spice tones, pepper, bonfire and a fine base of soil tones that will go autumnal as the wine ages. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a firm core of fruit, very good soil signature, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. This has turned out superbly well, as given its ripeness, I never expected a wine listed at fifteen percent octane to show no jamminess or heat on the backend. Fine juice and a Herculean effort for such a challenging vintage! 2027-2065+. **92**.

### **2016 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine Féraud et Fils**

The 2016 Châteauneuf du Pape from Domaine Féraud et Fils is composed of a blend of ninety percent grenache and five percent each of syrah and mourvèdre. Eddie Féraud is the cousin of Laurence Féraud at Domaine Pegau and started his five hectare domaine in 1983. His vines are located close to Château Rayas and planted on a combination of sand and clay soils; his grenache is all old vines. The wine is fermented whole cluster in cement vats and raised in old *foudres* for sixteen months prior to bottling. The 2016 version tips the scales at 15.5 percent octane and offers up a deep and ripe nose of fruitcake, baked black raspberries, woodsmoke, hung game, pepper, spice and a good base of soil that is already getting a bit autumnal. On the palate the wine is deep, chewy and full-bodied, with a roasted patina to the fruit, a good core, firm, chewy tannins and a long, complex and surprisingly well-balanced finish that does not show all that much heat on the backend. This is a very well-made wine from a year that dictated its octane level. Structurally, it is quite a bit like the drought vintage character of the 2010

Bordeaux wines, with the raisined bunches concentrating sugars, acids and tannins. It is very well-made in its style, but it is a big, tangy and chewy wine and will not be to everyone's stylistic tastes. 2026-2045. **88.**



### **2016 Châteauneuf du Pape “Le Plateau de Mont-Redon”- Château Mont-Redon**

The 2016 vintage marks the very first for this old vine bottling of Châteauneuf du Pape from Mont-Redon. These vines used in this cuvée are all now nearly one hundred years of age, as they were all planted in 1923 when Henri Plantin inherited Mont-Redon and began to resuscitate the vineyard land on the estate, after phylloxera had killed nearly all of the vines here. The plateau section at Mont-Redon is comprised entirely of *galets roulés*, the soils that look like acre upon acre of potato-sized stones left here by the retreat of the glaciers many millennia ago. The *cépages* of the 2016 Le Plateau bottling is sixty percent grenache and forty percent syrah, with the wine all raised in Burgundy casks for eighteen months prior to being racked into stainless steel tanks for an additional ten months of *élevage* before bottling. The barrels used for this wine are either new or one wine barrels, so there is some new oak influence on both the nose and palate, but it is remarkably restrained. The bouquet is deep, complex and excellent, wafting from the glass in a blend of black raspberries, pepper, spit-roasted venison, a gorgeous base of stony soil tones, gentle notes of *garrigue*, woodsmoke and a rather discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows plenty of old vine creaminess at the core, with superb soil signature, ripe, buried tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very, very long, perfectly balanced finish. Like the 2017 regular bottling from Mont-Redon, this wine comes in

listed at fifteen percent octane, but it really just does not seem that ripe to my palate! This is stunning wine! 2026-2075. **96.**

### ***Vacqueyras***

#### **2017 Vacqueyras “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine les Semelles de Vent**

Domaine les Semelles de Vent is located in Vacqueyras, though they also produce Gigondas and a tiny bit of one hundred percent pure mourvèdre Châteauneuf du Pape. Their old vine bottling of Vacqueyras is the second most-limited production wine that they make (after the Châteauneuf), with the *cépages* here being seventy-five percent grenache and twenty-five percent syrah. The grenache vines were planted in the 1950s and the syrah in the 1970s, with the wine raised in a combination of older casks and *demi-muids* for sixteen to eighteen months prior to bottling, without fining or filtration. The 2017 version is excellent on both the nose and palate, offering up a deep and complex bouquet of dark berries, roasted meats, bonfire, pepper, a fine array of spice tones and a bit of autumnally-inclined soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven in personality, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, complex and still fairly youthful finish. This is a seriously structured example of Vacqueyras, and though it is approachable today, it really deserves some more bottle age to soften up a bit more and blossom properly. A fine example. 2024-2045. **91.**

### ***Gigondas***

#### **2018 Gigondas- Réserve Mont-Redon**

The Réserve Mont-Redon Gigondas made its debut in the estate’s lineup in the 2017 vintage, with the 2018 their second effort from this appellation. The wine is made from purchased grapes and is composed of a blend of eighty-five percent grenache, nine percent syrah and six percent mourvèdre, with one-third of the cuvée spending a few months in smaller Burgundy casks and the remainder in traditional, larger *foudres*. The 2018 Gigondas offers up a fine and classic nose of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, *garrigue*, a fine base of soil tones and just a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a superb core of fruit, good mineral undertow and grip, ripe tannins and a long, complex finish. This wine is nicely light on its feet for a 2018, with impressive transparency down to its soil. Fine juice. 2028-2060. **93.**

#### **2018 Gigondas “Clos du Garde”- Domaine les Semelles de Vent**

The 2018 Gigondas “Clos du Garde” from Domaine les Semelles de Vent is comprised of a blend of seventy-five percent grenache and twenty-five percent syrah. The varieties are co-fermented in cement vats and the wine aged fourteen months in six hundred liter *demi-muids*, ranging from two to six years of age, prior to bottling without fining or filtration. The 2018 offers up a ripe and peppery nose of black raspberries, a touch of fruitcake, hung game, pepper, *garrigue* and a smoky topnote of redolent of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful in personality, with a good core of fruit, chewy tannins and good focus and grip on the long and fairly well-balanced finish. This a good robust example of Gigondas, with a fairly black fruity and peppery personality in 2018, but with some time to soften up its tannins, it will drink quite nicely. 2025-2055. **89.**

#### **2017 Gigondas “Clos du Garde”- Domaine les Semelles de Vent**

The 2017 vintage of Clos du Garde Gigondas from Domaine les Semelles de Vent is a bit more red fruity in personality than the 2018 version, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a

fine blend of red and black raspberries, roasted venison, pepper, a nice touch of autumnal soil tones, woodsmoke and a bit of fruitcake in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely delineated, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex and well-balanced finish. The 2017 is not as powerful in personality as the 2018 version and seems a bit more precise on the palate, but it too is a wine that will want some cellaring before it really starts to drink with generosity. 2025-2055. **90.**



### ***Cairanne Blanc et Rouge***

#### **2019 Cairanne Blanc- Domaine les Hautes Cances**

The 2019 Cairanne Blanc from Domaine les Hautes Cances is composed of a blend of grenache blanc, clairette, bourblenc and viognier. The 2019 is bright and expressive on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of quince, green apple, white flowers and a nice base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and succulent, with a good core, fine soil signature and grip, sound framing acids and a long, fairly complex finish. This is a good bottle for drinking over the next three to four years. 2020-2024. **88.**

#### **2017 Cairanne “les Trois Terroirs”- Domaine Boisson**

The Cairanne “les Trois Terroirs” from Domaine Boisson is made of a *cépages* of fifty percent grenache, twenty percent each of syrah and mourvèdre and ten percent carignan. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, usually includes about sixty percent whole clusters and is raised in a combination of older barrels and *demi-muids*, with the mix dictated by the style

of the vintage. The 2017 offers up a bright and classy nose of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, *garrigue*, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, pepper and a spicy topnote redolent of sandalwood. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, ripe and solid, with a fine core and mineral drive, well-integrated tannins and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. This is really an excellent Cairanne! 2021-2040. **91.**

### **2016 Cairanne “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine les Hautes Cances**

The Cairanne “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine les Hautes Cances is truly and old vine bottling, as the grenache vines here (which constitutes seventy percent of the blend) are fully one hundred years of age! The balance of the cuvée is split evenly between syrah (all petite serine from Ampuis and planted in 1962) and mourvèdre, planted in 1952! The 2016 version is a lovely wine, offering up a deep and complex nose of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, woodsmoke, pepper, a lovely base of soil, gentle spice tones and just a whisper of oak from its sojourn in older Burgundy casks. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and meaty, with a fine core of old vine fruit, lovely soil signature and grip, ripe tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. The wine is approachable today, albeit a bit chewy, but I would be inclined to tuck it away for at least a few years in the cellar and let it soften up a bit more on the backend. This comes in listed at the same 14.5 percent octane as the 2015 version, but it seems cooler in the mouth to my palate and I like this even a hair better than the very good 2015 version. Fine juice! 2024-2045. **92.**

### ***Saint-Joseph Blanc***

#### **2018 Saint-Joseph “Clef de Sol” Blanc- Domaine Jolivet**

The 018 Saint-Joseph “Clef de Sol” Blanc from Bastien Jolivet is comprised of a blend of ninety-five percent marsanne and five percent roussanne. The wine is aged in older casks for one year prior to bottling and the 2018 comes in (particularly for this hot summer) at a very civilized 13.5 percent octane. The wine offers up a ripe, but vibrant bouquet of pineapple, pear, a touch of hazelnut, stony soil tones, a touch of honeysuckle, orange peel and a very, very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very nicely balanced for a 2018 white, with a good core, lovely soil signature, sound framing acids and a long, complex and wide open finish. As this is from the blazing summer of 2018, the acids here are not particularly taut, and so drinking the wine over the relative near term will pay dividends, but there is freshness and precision here that is most impressive and was no doubt, hard to attain with white wines in 2018! Good juice. 2020-2025. **89.**

#### **2017 Saint-Joseph Blanc- Domaine Bernard Gripa**

The Gripa family is quite unique in Saint-Joseph in that they produce equal amounts of red and white wine. Their Saint-Joseph blanc is composed of a blend of seventy percent marsanne and thirty percent roussanne, with all of the vineyards planted on the terraced granite hillsides in the immediate vicinity of the domaine’s home village of Mauves. Fabrice Gripa ferments this bottling in stainless steel and raised it in a one-third each combination of old Burgundy barrels, older *demi-muids* and vat. His 2017 Saint-Joseph Blanc offers up a ripe and complex nose of pear, white peach, hazelnut, stony soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely zesty, with a fine core of fruit, good acids and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This has the balance to age nicely, but is wide open already and very tasty out of the blocks. 2020-2035. **91.**

### ***Saint-Joseph Rouge***

#### **2018 Saint-Joseph “Clos de la Ribaudy”- Domaine Julien Barge**

The 2018 Clos de la Ribaudy from Julien Barge is a beautiful example of both this vintage and the higher level examples of classical Saint-Joseph. The bouquet is deep, pure and already nicely expressive, wafting from the glass in a mix of cassis, black olive, pepper, grilled meats, dark soil, lovely spice tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and very transparent in personality, with a superb core of black fruit, excellent complexity and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, focused and vibrant finish. Stylistically, this reminds me very much of the Saint-Joseph bottling from Gérard Chave back in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is not particularly powerful, but intensely flavored and impeccably balanced for a long and beautiful evolution in bottle. 2025-2050+. **92.**

#### **2018 Saint-Joseph “l’Instinct”- Domaine Jolivet**

Bastien Jolivet’s cuvée l’Instinct is their workhorse bottling of Saint-Joseph, with the vines having been planted between the 1950s and the 1970s and the wine raised in a combination of Burgundy casks and *demi-muids*. Between the two, about seven percent of the cooperage is new in any given vintage. Fifty to seventy percent of the bunches are destemmed for this bottling, depending on the vintage. The 2018 l’Instinct offers up a deep and youthfully complex bouquet of cassis, pepper, roasted meats, granite soil tones, tapenade and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with a still quite primary personality, fine balance and grip, ripe tannins and a long, very promising finish, with backend energy to burn. This is a young, structured and serious example of Saint-Joseph and it will need at least a handful of years to blossom, but it is going to be excellent when it is ready to drink! 2028-2055. **91.**

#### **2017 Saint-Joseph “Cuvée 1907”- Domaine Jolivet**

This bottling is made from the Jolivet family’s oldest vines, whose age is unknown. The vineyard has a small stone hut (a *Cabotte*) that has 1907 inscribed on its arch, so the family believes the vines are the same age as the *Cabotte*. These old vines are always fermented separately, but only in very top years does Bastien bottle them on their own; in other vintages they are blended into his Saint-Joseph “l’Instinct” bottling. The 2017 “Cuvée 1907” was raised in twenty percent new oak and delivers a deep, youthful and pure bouquet of black raspberries, cassis, black olive, plenty of smokiness, a superb base of dark soil tones and just a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This has more old vine sappiness at the core than the 2018 l’Instinct, which is a bit more powerful (reflecting the differences in vintages), but not as long or potentially refined as the 2017 Cuvée 1907. That said, this is still a young wine and will need another seven or eight years to really start to stir. 2027-2055. **92+.**

#### **2017 Saint-Joseph- Domaine Bernard Gripa**

The 2017 Saint-Joseph from Fabrice Gripa is made from vines that date all the way back to 1947, with the average age included in the blend around forty years-old. The wine is excellent in 2017, offering up a pure and utterly classical blend of cassis, black olives, smoked meats, pepper, granite, a nice touch of youthful stems and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully structured, with excellent mineral drive and grip, a fine core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced finish. This is a proper *vin de garde* bottle of young Saint-Joseph and it will need to be at least ten years of age

to really start to drink well. But, in due course, this will be outstanding and drink for decades and decades. 2027-2060. **93+**.



### ***Condrieu***

#### **2018 Condrieu “La Bonnette”- Domaine Rostaing**

The 2018 Condrieu “La Bonnette” from Pierre Rostaing is a ripe and very expressive wine out of the blocks, offering up a complex bouquet of pear, a hint of pineapple, a lovely base of white soil tones, coriander seed, honeysuckle and other musky floral scents. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and succulent on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, sound framing acids and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish. This is a ripe wine, coming in listed at fifteen percent, but it carries its alcohol admirably and is not hot at all on the backend. But, it is ripe and that means it will be best drunk up in its relative youth. 2020-2026+. **90**.

### ***Côte-Rôtie***

#### **2018 Côte-Rôtie “Les Côtes”- Domaine Julien Barge**

The Les Côtes bottling from Julien Barge is new, due to the family domaine losing the lease on a significant parcel of vines that they farmed in the famed *lieu à dit* of Côte Brune, which belong to a cousin who is now going to sell the grapes to a different domaine in Ampuis. As a result, Julien will no longer have enough production from the Côte Brune to make a cuvée solely from this vineyard and has decided to now blend his little bit of remaining Côte Brune

fruit with his production both from Côte Blonde (which has always been quite small) and La Combard to make a proper-sized cuvée, which he has renamed as Les Côtes. The 2018 vintage is the first for the Les Côtes and it is simply outstanding. The bouquet offers up a youthful and very promising blend of dark berries, cassis, smoked meats, pepper, a fine base of stony soil tones, a lovely touch of youthful spice from the stems, a hint of nutskin and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and soil-driven, with an excellent core of fruit, firm, buried tannins and truly stunning length and grip on the youthful and beautifully balanced finish. This is an outstanding and utterly classical Côte-Rôtie in the making! 2030-2080. **95.**

#### **2018 Côte-Rôtie “Ampodium”- Domaine Rostaing**

The 2018 Côte-Rôtie “Ampodium” bottling from Domaine Rostaing is pretty ripe in this vintage, coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane. However, the wine shows off beautiful purity on both the nose and palate and absolutely no signs of *sur maturité*, as the nose jumps from the glass in a lovely blend of cassis, black raspberries, grilled meats, pepper, a touch of hazelnut, a lovely foundation of soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful in profile, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe, chewy tannins and a very long, complex and very well-balanced balanced finish. This carries its ripeness extremely well, with a blade of minerality defining the palate. For the Ampodium bottling, the 2018 is most emphatically a “big boy” and will need plenty of cellaring time to soften up and blossom, but in due course, this will be superb. 2033-2080. **92.**

#### **2018 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Blonde”- Domaine Rostaing**

Domaine Rostaing’s 2018 Côte Blonde is a great Côte-Rôtie in the making. The *terroir* of the Côte Blonde often produces one of the most elegant interpretations of the appellation, and this dovetails beautifully with the style of the vintage. The wine delivers a superb young bouquet of black raspberries, cassis, toasted hazelnuts, a complex base of soil, smoked meats, pepper, just a hint of black olive, bonfire and a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, seamless and shows off great mid-palate depth, with ripe, buried tannins, excellent focus and grip, lovely soil signature and a very long, very refined and youthfully complex finish. Great juice. 2033-2090. **95+.**

#### **2018 Côte-Rôtie “La Landonne”- Domaine Rostaing**

The 2018 vintage of La Landonne from Pierre Rostaing is a gorgeous wine in the making. The bouquet is deep, pure and still fairly primary, offering up scents of black raspberry, dark berry, spit-roasted venison, coffee bean, pepper, a superb base of soil, incipient notes of the nutskin to come, gentle new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and more elegantly structured than the Ampodium, but with the same depth at the core, great mineral drive, ripe, firm tannins and a long, nascently complex, ripe and impeccably balanced finish. The Rostaing family’s La Landonne has been one of the iconic bottlings of Côte-Rôtie for two generations and the brilliant potential of the 2018 version is not going to take any luster off of that star! 2033-2090. **95.**

#### **2017 Côte-Rôtie “la Giroflarie”- Domaine Patrick Jasmin**

The Côte-Rôtie “la Giroflarie” from Patrick Jasmin is produced from the family’s vineyards, which are all in the *Côte de Blonde* section of the appellation, primarily in the *lieux à dits* of Les Moutonnes and La Côte Baudin. The wine is composed of a blend of ninety-six percent syrah and four percent viognier, co-planted and fermented together. The bunches have been destemmed here since the 1996 vintage, with only a tiny percentage of the casks used for

the *élevage* of the wine being new in any given vintage and Patrick Jasmin has been moving more and more towards puncheons and *demi-muids* for the aging of this bottling in recent years. The 2017 la Giroflarie offers up a fine bouquet of red and black raspberries, smoked meats, pepper, hazelnuts, a lovely base of soil, just a hint of spicy oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with an almost velvety texture on the attack, a lovely core, excellent mineral drive and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is an excellent bottle in the making! 2027-2065+. **93.**



### **1970 Côte-Rôtie “Tête de Cuvée”- Domaine J. Vidal-Fleury**

Vidal-Fleury is the oldest, and had been the most important *négociant* in Ampuis in the first of the twentieth century, and was still an important address in 1970. The family firm was founded all the way back in 1781! It is now owned by the Guigal family (purchased in 1984), where Etienne Guigal had been the Cellar Master prior to setting out on his own in 1946. The patriarch at Vidal-Fleury was Joseph Vidal-Fleury, who ran the *maison* for an amazing sixty-eight years, prior to passing away in 1976. The firm had an impressive array of top vineyards in Côte-Rôtie prior to being purchased by the Guigal family, including la Turquie, la Pommère and la Chatillonne, with the first two now well-known within the Guigal constellation of Côte-Rôtie bottlings. The 1970 Vidal-Fleury Côte-Rôtie continues to drink nicely at its advanced age of fifty, offering up a deep and tertiary bouquet of desiccated dark berries, smoked meats, pepper, *sous bois*, gentle spice tones that hint at clove and lavender, coffee and plenty of upper register

smokiness. On the palate the wine is still full-bodied and quite velvety on the attack, with a good core of fruit, fine complexity and focus, melted tannins and a long, wide open and well-balanced finish. This particular bottle had quite a crumbly cork, so there may be structurally even more robust examples still out there, but the wine is not fading and remains a lovely drink, albeit, with no rough edges and time in hand. This is a tad past its prime today, but descending with grace and dignity and still quite enjoyable to drink. 2020-2030. **88.**

### ***Languedoc et Roussillon***

#### **2017 Montpeyrroux- Mas d'Amile (Terraces du Larzac)**

The 2017 Montpeyrroux from Amélie d'Hurlaborde's Mas d'Amile is composed of an old vine blend of sixty percent grenache, twenty percent syrah and ten percent each of mourvèdre and carignan. The grapes are destemmed for this bottling, with the wine aged in older casks prior to bottling. The 2017 Montpeyrroux offers up a deep and complex nose of fruitcake, black raspberries, hung game, *garrigue*, beautiful soil tones, a touch of dried eucalyptus and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and soil-driven, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and very classy finish. This deserves a few years in the cellar to blossom more fully. Fine juice. 2024-2050. **91+.**