

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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THE ANNUAL GERMAN WINE REPORT

FIRST OF THE STUNNING 2019ERS AND LOADS OF 2018ERS



Old vines and perfectly ripe, loose cluster, bunches in one of Weingut Keller's grand crus in the Hügelland.

As readers will recall, the Coronavirus pandemic flexed its muscles early enough in March that I had to cancel my annual spring trip to Germany and Burgundy, where I would normally have spent ten days or so of the trip sampling the new vintage of 2019 in German wine country. Consequently, this report is a couple of issues later than customary in coming out and is nowhere near as broad as it could have been if I had been tasting in the German wine regions, rather than collecting samples here in the states. Fortunately, a number of growers who I usually have the pleasure to visit were able to organize samples of their 2019ers and send them along when they had finished their *elevage* and bottling, so after exercising patience for a few months, my doorstep started to look a lot like a Christmas Tree when the samples began to arrive. But, several of the estates I normally have on my spring travel calendar could not send samples, so I decided it made sense to broaden the feature and reach out to a few importers here in the US and see if they would like to send samples of some of their producers that I usually do not have time to visit during my spring trips, but whose wines I generally have enjoyed in the past. As I had not tasted these estates' 2018ers, I was happy to try the previous vintage, if the newly released 2019ers were not yet landed here in America. My goal was simply to try and cover more wines

with this report and find more bottles that could be recommended, as I never have enough time on the road in the spring to get around to everyone whose wines would merit a visit even if I had two or three times as many days to taste in Germany each spring.

As I wrote a long piece on the 2018 vintage back in Issue 80 last spring, I will only provide a thumbnail sketch of the vintage here and refer readers back to last spring's report if they wish greater detail on the growing season of 2018 in German wine country. The vintage of 2018 in Germany will always be defined by its endless days of sunshine and high temperatures, as a wet and typical winter quickly turned into summer-like conditions in the month of April and the heat and sunny days never relinquished their grip on wine country until September started to roll around. In 2018, it was not until the month of harvest arrived that the high temperatures relaxed a bit, but the sunshine continued on, even as temperatures descended back to more normal levels. As I noted back in Issue 80, thanks to good water reserves from the cold and wet winter, the fruit was able to ripen nicely in the heat of summer, with older vines particularly blessed in this regard, so that generally, hydric stress was not a huge problem for those with older vineyards. But, for those with younger vines, it was a constant challenge, and there were certainly instances of vines shutting down in the drought and heat of 2018 and physiological ripeness was not uniform by any stretch of the imagination across estates. So, the vintage ended up being rather heterogeneous in style, though, given my rather All Star lineup of estates with whom I visited in March of last year, there was far more consistency amongst the excellence of the lineups presented of 2018ers at the wineries I visited than was more generally typical of the vintage across the country. The high water marks of 2018 are truly exceptional wines and I came home to New York last spring with hundreds of 2018ers that I could wholeheartedly recommend.

Keep in mind that the 2018 vintage was one following severe frost damage in much of German wine country the year before in the spring of 2017. What is customary after a frost vintage is for the vines to have a huge store of pent up energy that was not utilized in the very short, frosted crop the year before, so high yields are the rule for most vintages following a year with heavy frost damage, unless some other natural occurrence pares back yields. In Germany in 2018, there was no such depredations and the fruit set was very large in the warm spring weather. In this context, younger vines are again a bit of a handicap, as they are far more prone to set a very large number of grape clusters, whereas older vines are more regular in their yields from year to year, even in vintages following a bad frost the previous spring. So, younger vines in 2018 generally had lots of grape bunches to try and ripen up in the heat and drought of 2018, and it is quite easy to imagine how certain vineyards in this vintage could have been faced with a serious challenge of ripening up a big cropload and getting it across the finish line. Though I did not personally taste a lot of wines made from inadequately ripe grapes in 2018, there were plenty of stories floating around during my trip to Germany in the spring of 2019 about 2018ers that were not physiologically ripe from these issues associated with young vines, large yields and hydric stress-generated slowing of maturation of the bunches.

Turning to the vintage of 2019 in Germany, this was once again one that favored those with significant parcels of old vines (just as in 2018), for it was once again a year where drought conditions would come into play. Fortunately, there are plenty of top estates throughout Germany that have lots of old vines. As Klaus-Peter Keller observes, "all in all, 2019 is a vintage for soils that could preserve the water very well, and a vintage of old vines with deep roots." As

so many of the greatest vineyard sites in Germany- particularly in regions such as the Mosel, Saar, Ruwer, Rheingau and parts of the Rheinhessen, are very steep sites planted on pure slate, water retention is most definitely not their strong suit, so old vines become even more important in these treasured vineyards. In the Hügelland, where many of Weingut Keller's greatest vineyards are located, the soils are limestone-based, rather than slate, and are more gently inclined hills, rather than steep slopes overlooking riversides, so perhaps winegrowers here had a bit of an advantage in this region. One is also starting to see more and more mulching in vineyards to also try and help protect water reserves, not to mention the growing of ground cover under the vines, all to try and push roots deeper down and help preserve water when there is precipitation. Julian Haart in Piesport decided during the winter that the potential of drought in 2019 should be taken into account during his pruning, as he explains: "the super-hot summer of 2018 meant a lot of stress for the vines, and to relieve them the best that we could, we pruned to a minimum in the winter, as we also had the expectation that the 2019 vintage could once again become very warm and dry and we needed to anticipate this to protect the vines."

As I have noted before, Germany has certainly benefited to some degree over the last quarter century by the phenomenon of global warming, moving from a cooler period where one or two top vintages per decade were the norm to one where one or two difficult vintages per decade are the new normal. As the most northerly traditional wine-producing country, German wine regions used to be right on the limit of where cultivation of grape vines made sense, and this is one of the primary reasons why so many of the country's greatest vineyards are perched on precipitous, south-facing slopes overlooking the Mosel and Rhine Rivers, as maximizing sunshine hours and even capturing reflected light off of the rivers' surfaces were critical to being able to ripen up a crop sufficiently to make great wine. And Mother Nature only used to allow this a few times out of every ten years in Germany. This has all changed since 1990, and today, German wine regions generally have little difficulty achieving perfect ripeness in almost every year and new and completely different challenges are emerging as climate change becomes permanent. As Klaus-Peter Keller reflects on the changes that have come along with global warming, "not all is sunshine today", as "the risk of frost after early budburst is increasing, as are hailstorms, increased erosion in the vineyards after heavy rains and long periods of summer drought and the plants' struggle with insufficient water reserves are all causing growing concern." So, while getting the bunches ripe is no longer the primary challenge for Germany's winegrowers today, and the earlier and earlier starts to harvest here attest strongly to this phenomenon, global warming is creating a new set of challenges to be surmounted every year in order for *vignerons* to produce great wines.

The growing season of 2019 was another year very much defined by its copious quantity of sunshine, but the weather pattern was also quite different from the previous year. Spring was once again out of the blocks early, but it had not rained quite as much as the previous winter, so the restocked subterranean water levels were not quite as robust as had been true going into the torrid summer of 2018. But, this varied from region to region, as for example, in the Nahe, Weingut Dönnhoff reported that "January started with abundant precipitation" which "replenished the groundwater stocks" and which "would prove to be extremely valuable later in the year." However, in the Hügelland, Klaus-Peter Keller mentions that "there had been none of the winter rain that in 2017/2018 had provided such an important reserve for the vines in the hot summer of 2018." April was warm and sunny in 2019 (following the example set by 2018), so

that budbreak was once again very early and ended up occurring on almost the same dates as in the previous year. However, May turned a different meteorological leaf, with unseasonably cold temperatures and even some serious bouts of frost on the evening of May 5th, putting the brakes on the precocious start to the growing season of 2019. As far as I know, the frost damage was most keenly felt in the Saar and the Ruwer regions, whereas in the middle Mosel, it was mostly a cause for some sleepless nights and serious worry, but nowhere near the same damage as in the Saar and Ruwer. The Nahe also experienced some frost damage, but not extensively. The weather did not warm up again to normal late spring temperatures until the very end of May, which cancelled out much of the early start of the warm weather of late March and April, but allowed for good conditions for flowering at the end of June.

The next two months were generally warm and sunny, but nowhere near as hot on a day to day basis as it had been the case in Germany in 2018. There was some rain beginning in July, which proved most welcome to vines that were nicely progressing at this point in the season, and a bit of evening rain would crop up with some frequency throughout the rest of the summer. Klaus-Peter Keller's records for 2019 of rainfall in his grand cru vineyard of Hubacker from August to October showed the same average as vintages such as 2010, 2013 and 2017, with just under 200 mm of precipitation; in contrast, in 2018, there had only been 58 mm of rainfall in the Hubacker during this three month period. However, this pattern of nice, seasonable weather was interrupted by a brutal heat spike that lasted three or four days in August, with temperatures actually getting above forty degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit!) and sunburned grapes were to become a problem as a result of the brutally high temperatures during this short and violent heat wave. At Weingut Hermann Dönnhoff in the Nahe, the family notes that canopy management was key to trying to protect the bunches as much as possible with shade during the this period of unrelenting heat, and this strategy was employed far and wide across Germany to do the same. But, no one was able to escape some sunburn during this sweltering handful of days in August and sorting out the sunburnt berries would become one of the chief challenges when the harvest got rolling in the second half of September.

Fortunately for the ultimate quality of the vintage, the heat spike of furnace-like temperatures only lasted for a short time and by early September, conditions were absolutely ideal, with daytime temperatures returning to normal and evenings quite cool, with some nighttime temperatures dipping down into the forties (Fahrenheit). This helped preserve the good acidity one finds across the board in the 2019 vintage, even as the sugars climbed nicely towards the finishing line. Christophe and Andrea Schaefer in Graach got started picking on September 25th, after having spent quite a bit of time out in the vines over the previous couple of weeks pruning away sunburned grapes and bunches that had suffered in the heat spike of early August. Julian Haart in Piesport was out even earlier, beginning to bring in fruit on September 16th, selecting grapes for Kabinett "under brilliant weather." Weingut Dönnhoff in the Nahe got rolling with the main portion of their harvest on the 23rd of the month. However, the second half of September's cooler temperatures came with a price, as there was a tend day rainy period during harvest, though fortunately, with lower temps, the spread of rot in the vineyards was not a major concern and picking was "stop and go" for several days under spells of drizzle and light rain. With part of the harvest already in all across Germany, the rainy days ended at the start of October, and sunny days returned and significantly higher temperatures than had been the case in early September, so the bunches still remaining out on the vines were treated to a perfect *fin de*

saison for the next two weeks, with cool evenings, fine, warm sunny days and the advent of some very, very high quality botrytis as well in many vineyards. By mid-October, rains returned and winegrowers pushed hard to bring all the perfect bunches they still had out on the vines into the cellars before the weather turned against them mid-month.



One of those loose clusters that growers cited as so important during the light rains at the start of harvest.

As Christophe and Andrea Schaefer note of the beautiful weather of the first half of October, “we took advantage of these dry and up to 27 degrees Celsius warm days to pick excellent grapes for our Auslese and Beerenauslese wines” and the wines have turned out “simply fantastic!” But the warmer temperatures that began in the second week in October also accelerated sugar accumulation, so picking teams everywhere had to ramp up their pace to frenetic levels to gather in everything in optimal condition. Early October’s beautiful weather put the finishing touches on a superb vintage, with botrytis where it occurred making dessert wines possible and plenty of “golden berry” bunches, which also contributed to the vintage’s gorgeous Auslesen. The early part of the harvest had been beautiful for Kabinett and dry wines, so good in fact, that Klaus-Peter Keller noted that “we did not make any GG in Nierstein in 2019, as the vintage was so perfect for Kabinett”, though “many people thought we were crazy” with this decision (no doubt, given the price discrepancies between classical Kabinett and Grosses Gewächs bottlings). But, as he continues, “I love Kabinett so much, and I think it is an important message to not just talk about things, but to really do it!” And fortunately, he has the flexibility

to be able to make the wines that the vintage dictates as the finest in potential, without having to take into account what customers or importers might be demanding. So there are no Grosses Gewächs bottlings from the Pettenthal or Hipping vineyards from Weingut Keller in 2019, but as I write this, Klaus-Peter reports that has just finished the bottling of the two Kabinetten he produced from these steep, red slate vineyards and pronounced himself extremely satisfied with how they have turned out. I am already looking forward to trying them down the road!

Several of the winegrowers that I spoke with about the quality of the 2019 vintage commented that the style of the bunches this year turned out to be quite important, as the flowering had produced bunches that were not particularly tight, which allowed for good air circulation during and after the light rains that fell during the last week or so of September. Selection was still of paramount importance at harvest time, as not only did any sunburnt grapes have to be cut away (or bunches left on the ground) from the heat spike of early August, but then one had to be vigilant for signs of rot from the rainy weather in the second half of September. As Constantin Richter of Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter noted, “sunburn was a huge issue in 2019” and “we lost almost twenty percent of the grapes to it, and we had a lot of work in the vineyards during the picking to select out the burned berries.” Due to the flowering conditions of 2019, as well as the strict selection of the top estates, yields are fairly low in 2019, but the quality is exemplary. As Christophe and Andrea Schaefer comment, “vintage 2019 offered every spectrum the Riesling grape can offer: healthy and crunchy grapes, picture-book-like grapes with small golden berries, as well as perfectly botrytized bunches.” The Schaefer estate was able to produce a full range of styles in 2019, with even a Grosses Gewächs bottling from their holdings in the Himmelreich vineyard in Graach, all the way up to a Beerenauslese from the Domprobst. Harvests generally ended the third week or so of October, with the Schaefer family finishing on October 19th and Weingut Dönnhoff completing its picking on October 22nd.

While I was extremely fortunate to have so many top estates send me samples of their 2019ers for inclusion in this report, there was, of course, a price to pay for having samples sent, rather than being able to taste at the estates earlier in the spring. Most obviously, there are no notes below on any 2019 Grosses Gewächs bottlings, as those wines cannot be officially released until September. When one reflects about how perfect the 2019 growing season was for producing wines in a dry or sweeter style, the absence of all those beautiful 2019 GGs hurts. Fortunately, the decision to expand the article to cover so many 2018ers I had not covered last spring allowed for a fine sampling of Grosses Gewächs bottlings from that fine vintage, and their inclusion produced one of the biggest surprises for me in preparing this article, as I was able to taste a full range of 2018 Grosses Gewächs bottlings from Weingut Dr. Loosen in Bernkastel. Prior to this article’s tastings, I was most familiar with the Prädikat wines from Ernst Loosen, but had never had a chance to taste a range of his dry wine offerings. I was mightily impressed with the quality of his Grosses Gewächs bottlings from vineyards such as the Wehlener Sonnenuhr, Ürziger Würzgarten, and the Treppchen and Prälät vineyards in village of Erden. I had no idea just how superb these dry wines were at Dr. Loosen, so that was one “silver lining” to not being able to travel this spring and configuring the article the way I have.

Beyond the hole created by not being able to taste 2019 Grosses Gewächs bottlings, it was also not possible for some of the larger estates to send the full range of their various cuvées, as some were not yet bottled when they put together their shipment of samples, and others have

enough different wines in 2019 that they had to make a selection of bottlings to send along. When I am visiting the estates personally, it is usually just before bottling, so nearly everything is made available for tasting. As this was not the case with this article, I hope to have an opportunity to follow-up with more 2019ers a couple of issues down the road, with samples of some of the later bottled wines from many of the estates who are covered below. As it seems unlikely that Americans will be welcome to travel to Europe anytime soon, I will have to try to have another round of samples sent from some of the estates who provided 2019ers for this report. In any event, as readers will see as they scroll further down in this feature, there are still plenty of excellent wines covered from the 2019 vintage, which is clearly one of the greatest in recent memory across all of Germany. And beyond the notes on the 2019ers, I was also very happy to sample a fine range of 2018ers from estates I could not visit last spring. The 2018 vintage may not quite scale the heights of 2019, at least on a consistency basis, but this remains a top quality vintage that I like very, very much, as the high water marks of 2018 are truly stunning wines in their own right.

One thing that merits a mention here is that tasting so many young German wines out of bottle for this report has given me an opportunity to taste a lot more wines sealed under screwcap than I normally would on my spring trips to the wineries (where a great many wines have not yet been bottled). Readers and winegrowers are already more than familiar with how little I like this particular closure, so I generally no longer comment extensively about screwcaps. But, working through so many samples sealed under screwcap, many from the 2018 vintage and now a bit more than a year out from bottling, really brought into focus the effect this closure has on the wines. While only a few of the screwcapped 2018ers that I tasted had any aromatic or flavor issues associated with early reduction, almost all of the screwcap wines already had a very perceptible difference to their palate textures from this closure, in comparison to those sealed under cork. The screwcap-sealed wines that I tasted for this report all (to varying degrees), showed different textural elements on their finishes from the closures, which I can only describe as a pinching and/or shredded sensation on the backends. Rieslings sealed under screwcaps are nowhere near as harmonious or complete on the finish as those sealed under natural cork, and I have to assume that this is caused by a combination of both the different preparation methods that are used on wines destined to be closed under the screw, distinct from those to be sealed with natural cork, as well as how the wines develop differently once bottled under each specific closure.

As my methodology for this report was to taste each estate's complete lineup in a single sitting, much as I would do when visiting the wineries in Germany, I would routinely start with the more entry level dry bottlings and work my way up through the single vineyard dry wines, before moving onto entry level wines with residual sugar and then finish with the Prädikat wines sealed under natural cork. Doing so afforded me the opportunity to progress from typically screwcapped entry level dry wines, to more expensive Trocken wines sealed under natural cork, and then back to screwcaps for the entry level off-dry wines and then back to natural corks for the Prädikat wines from the Spätlese level upwards, as several producers bottle their range of Kabinetten under screwcaps these days (no doubt to keep them as affordable as possible for their clientele). While such an approach does not allow for an "apples to apples" comparison of screwcapped wines to those sealed under natural corks (as to do so would require two samples of the same wine, each sealed under the different closure), it did at least allow for repeated jumping

back and forth between screwcaps and natural cork-sealed wines. Leaving aside any aromatic or flavor issues from reduction (which again, were seldom in evidence with such recently-bottled wines), there was a pretty consistent and rather dramatic difference in the textural sensation of the finishes of each group of differently-sealed wines. To try and use an analogy, the screwcapped wines were rather like the early days of the CD revolution, when the digital technology was still in its infancy, and one would lose dynamic range and completeness of sound on the CDs, in comparison to the analog recordings captured on vinyl. The difference between the two recording technologies were often described as the CDs providing a “hollow” sound in comparison to the “warmer and rounder” sound of the analog recording. There is something along the same lines quite evident on the finishes of young Riesling sealed under their respective closures, though I have probably not done a very good job of trying to describe my impressions. I would imagine that this difference was certainly highlighted by my going back and forth between wines sealed under the different closures in a single sitting.

Anyway, I have probably belabored this discussion of closures more than most readers would like, but felt I should at least mention it, as the differences were very evident this time around. The long and short of the 2019 vintage in Germany is that this is an absolutely superb vintage and one of the very finest of the last quarter century. Though I have not had the opportunity, due to the pandemic, to taste as many full ranges as I would normally do during a visit to the region, it is absolutely clear from what I have tried that 2019 is truly a legendary vintage and one that has allowed every style of wine to excel, so one does not have to focus solely on dry wines, or Prädikat wines or sweeter, dessert wines, as everything is stellar. 2019 is simply a vintage that has something for everyone! As Constantin Richter notes, “overall the taste and data of the juices were great” for the 2019ers, with “moderate to high *Oechsle* levels and good acidity levels”, not to mention “some early good botrytis.” He continues, “for me, 2019 is a vintage that you can compare with 2015 or 2001.” Klaus-Peter Keller also finds similarities between 2019 and the 2001 vintage, as he notes of the young 2019ers in cask: “you can taste the small yields” in these wines, as “there are high levels of dry extract and they are very well balanced by fine acidity.” He concludes, “at this stage, they remind me a little of the 2001 vintage- one sip from the cask makes you thirst for the next one.”

The reports from several winegrowers of just how good the 2019 vintage’s growing conditions were for Kabinett wines in particular was certainly borne out by the samples I tasted from this Prädikat level. I tasted several Kabinetten from 2019 that I would have to rank up with the very finest I have ever tasted this early on in the vintage’s evolution, and I have little doubt that a generation down the line, people will look back on this vintage as one of the greatest ever for Kabinetten. However, this can also be said for many of the 2019 Spätlesen which I tasted as well, as there are certainly some legends in the making at this level. And then we arrive at the Auslesen of 2019, which also are clearly of historic quality levels. Other recent vintages have had more Auslesen produced solely from ripe golden berries than 2019 (which I personally love), as the botrytis was so good and so clean this year that most of the Auslesen that I tasted from this vintage seem to be glazed with at least some botrytis, or at least this is my impression based solely on tasting the wines. In a normal year, I would have been able to ask about this while tasting with the producer; however, we all know 2020 is not a normal year. But, what beautifully measured and pure botrytis it is! It is ironic that in a vintage that was so perfect with the possibility to produce brilliant Kabinetten, twenty or thirty years down the road, the most

legendary wines of 2019 may still end up being the Auslesen of the vintage! And, remember, I have tasted absolutely none of the Grosses Gewächs bottlings yet from 2019, so perhaps it will end up being a vintage remembered for its legendary dry wines. But, no matter which yardsticks history will choose from 2019, it will be a legendary vintage that is long remembered by lovers of German wines!

The following notes are organized by region and then estate. I have listed all of the 2019ers I have tasted first, followed by all the new notes I have accrued on 2018ers. Within each vintage section, the wines are grouped first by region, followed by producer in alphabetical order. I should also take a moment to note that tasting the 2019ers now, in July and August, rather than in March, as is my customary time to taste the new vintage, did produce a far higher degree of closed wines, post-bottling, than what I would generally encounter in the spring. In March, I usually try to time my visits for right before the big and important trade fair of Prowein in Düsseldorf, as many estates work to bottle a selection of the new vintage to show there. With my March visits, I usually will encounter a range of wines that have just been bottled (but have not yet shut down post-bottling), coupled with wines that are just about finished with their *elevage* and are destined to be bottled in the weeks following Prowein. While German wines at this stage of their evolutions can sometimes be a bit yeasty from their contact with their fine lees, they generally are at a good moment for tasting. This year, with Covid requiring that samples be shipped, the wines are now all bottled and a few months out from their *mise*, and I ran into some examples of 2019ers that were already pretty shut down post-bottling and not as easy to get a read on as would have been the case in March. Such is the world that we live in today. I do not think that it overtly affected my ability to assess the quality of the wines, but I did get the sense that some of the real fireworks which many of these stellar 2019ers possess were currently a bit subdued or hidden by their recent bottling. All of this is a long way of saying that many of the best 2019ers are going to be even more complex and exciting than my tasting notes may suggest, once the wines have fully recovered from bottling and start to hit on all cylinders!

Mosel 2019ers

Weingut Johann Joseph Christoffel (Ürzig)

Since Robert Eymael bought this great old estate in Ürzig, he has embraced screwcaps for all of his Kabinetten and Spätlesen bottlings. When he first did this early in the new century, it was so a bit out of the ordinary for a great, traditional estate and disheartening enough for me that I thereafter lost track of the estate's wines, after tasting the new vintage at the time at Prowein in Düsseldorf. Given my lack of fondness for this closure, I suppose that this was not surprising. The first range of wines from the new regime which I tasted at Prowein were from the 2007 vintage. I revisited the estate's range on display from the 2010 vintage a couple of years later (again at Prowein), and was no more impressed, but to be fair to the 2010ers here, this was a freakishly high acid vintage and many estates chose to de-acidify many of their wines in this vintage. Given that it had not been necessary to de-acidify a vintage for a generation in the Mosel, there were plenty of difficulties at estates with trying this procedure and my impression this time was that a few of the Christoffel 2010s had perhaps suffered from a less than seamless de-acidification. However, given that I started selling the estate's wines in the 1985 vintage and followed them every year up until 2002, when the change of ownership occurred, there has been a hole in my coverage in not keeping up with the Christoffel wines over the last dozen years or so and I was very happy to have a chance to taste a small handful of the 2019ers here. The results

were very impressive, with the wines across the board showing the filigreed and shimmering beauty I remember from my days following the estate vintage to vintage, and my impression was that the use of screwcaps here is affecting the wines less today than was the case early on in the new regime's tenure, when I sampled a range of 2007ers and 2010ers. I would still be far happier if the wines were sealed under natural cork (no surprise here), but these three 2019ers are really very, very strong examples of their respective terroirs and Prädikats and all come highly recommended. Whether or not reduction from their screwcaps might become an issue down the road is an open question, but as many wine lovers often drink their Kabinetten and Spätlesen in their first blush of youth, I suspect that most folks who buy these wines will not be troubled at all that they are bottled under screwcaps. At least stylistically, these 2019ers are beautiful reflections of this great vintage, and seem to me to be cut from the same cloth as the 2001ers and 2002ers that I still have resting comfortably in my cellar and which are aging beautifully.



2019 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Kabinett AP #3- Weingut Joh. Jos. Christoffel (s.cap)

The 2019 Erdener Treppchen Kabinett AP #3 from Robert Eymael is a beautifully expressive and refined wine on the nose, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of apple, strawberry, slate, lilacs and fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and filigreed, with lovely intensity of flavor and lightness of step, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. There is just a hint of bitterness on the backend here

that I assume is from the closure, but this is really one of the better screwcapped wines I tasted for this report, and it seems that Herr Eymael is pretty good at using this closure. I would still vastly prefer to see this wine sealed under natural cork, as it is a beautiful Kabinett in the making, but for the moment, this has pretty good backend textural fidelity, despite the screwcap. 2020-2040+? **92.**

2019 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett AP #4 - Weingut Joh. Jos. Christoffel (s.cap)

The 2019 Ürziger Würzgarten Kabinett AP #4 from the Christoffel estate is even a hair more refined on the nose than the very fine Treppchen Kabinett, wafting from the glass in a sophisticated blend of strawberries, white cherries, violets, lovely Würzgarten spice tones, a fine base of slate, violets and bee pollen. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-bodied and again, impressively filigreed, with lovely focus and grip, a well water purity that is quintessential Kabinett, bright acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Kabinett, but I worry (as is my wont) about the closure's effect on its ultimate aging curve. It already seems like the finish is slightly pinched by the screwcap, but we shall see how the wine unfolds with bottle age under the screw. For the moment, it is excellent wine. 2020-2040+. **93.**

2019 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese AP #5- Weingut Joh. Jos. Christoffel (s.cap)

There are not a lot of estates that bottle their Spätlesen under screwcaps, but Robert Eymael has been doing this here since he purchased the winery and vineyards. I am not sure if he offers his Spätlesen under both natural cork and screwcap, or exclusively under screwcap, but this is not a practice I encounter at many German estates, no matter how vociferous is their support of the modern closure. At least out of the blocks, the closure is doing no harm to this beautiful Würzgarten Spätlese, which offers up a bright and complex bouquet of pear, strawberry, lime blossoms, a lovely base of slate minerality, bee pollen, gentle spice tones and a topnote of apple blossom. On the palate the wine is bright, pure, medium-full and vibrant, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, bright acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. I have the sense that the screwcap is already starting to clamp down a bit on the finish, so decant this wine for thirty minutes before drinking, just to obviate that aspect of the closure. The raw materials here are beautiful. 2020-2045+. **93.**

Weingut Julian Haart (Piesport)

Julian Haart reports that he loves the quality of the 2019 vintage, though it is not a particularly generous year in terms of yields, and when one is as small a domaine as this one, those very short yields sting a little more than if you have fifty hectares of vines with which to work each year! But as Julian notes, "the perfect thing is that you really taste the low yields in 2019" and the wines have come out perfectly balanced, "as we have a great acidity and high extracts in our wines" from this vintage. He continues, "we are especially proud for the dry wines this year." Julian and his wife Nadine kindly sent me six samples of their short crop of 2019ers for inclusion in this report- his three grand cru dry Rieslings, which I always list as Grosses Gewächs bottlings in my notes, though Julian does not use this term for the wines, as it is reserved for estates who are members of the VDP. But, as they are grand crus, I list them as such. The other three wines that the couple sent to me were their three extraordinary Kabinetten from the vintage- one Alte Reben version from the Ohligsberg vineyard and two from the Goldtröpfchen, with one being another special, old vine bottling this year. Beyond this lovely six pack, Julian also produced his customary Thousand Liter bottling, a Moselle Riesling, a single Spätlese from the Goldtröpfchen and several Auslesen from both the Ohligsberg and

Goldtröpfchen vineyards, but I did not have the chance to taste them for this report. Given how absolutely brilliant every 2019er I did taste from the estate showed this year, I have little doubt that the quality is equally stunning for the wines I did not get a chance to taste.

As I mentioned above, Julian, Nadine and their team started picking on September 16th this year, with the first week focused on their Kabinetten, of which all three are absolutely stellar examples of the vintage. As Julian relates, “the first week of the harvest was brilliant weather”, but then it turned rainy and for the next week and a half “and then we had to select an awful lot in the vineyards” to sort out the botrytized berries and make sure that they did not find their way into the baskets destined for the dry wines. The three 2019 Grosses Gewächs from Julian Haart are all superb young wines, but this was one case where tasting them a few months out from bottling found them decidedly more shut down than would have been the case if I could have tasted them at the estate in March, and I had the distinct impression that, love them as I did, I was only seeing a single facet of each of these multi-dimensional wines. The 2019 Frauenberg GG, from the Hügelland in the Rheinhessen, was particularly closed down when I tried it in August, and I look forward to visiting this wine again somewhere down the road, once it has opened up again from its bottling, and I can see it in full bloom! The three Kabinetten from Julian and Nadine are all magical, and they have to rank as among the very finest wines I tasted from the vintage, at any Prädikat level. Given that the GGs here were quite closed down, three or four months out from their bottling, I have to assume this was also the case with the Kabinetten, and again, there will be even more elements of complexity in these wines when they start to blossom than I was able to see in August of this year! Though I did not taste the full range of 2019ers here, it is quite clear that this is a brilliant vintage for Julian and Nadine Haart and the wines will be worth a special search to find in the market. Given that the yields are so small here, do not delay in scouring the market for a few bottles of the 2019ers from Weingut Julian Haart!

2019 Frauenberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs AP #13- Weingut Julian Haart

The 2019 vintage is the second for the Frauenberg bottling from Julian Haart. The wine has come in at thirteen percent octane this year and offers up a really beautiful young nose of white peach, bread fruit, a beautiful base of limestone minerality, white flowers, a touch of wild yeasts and a touch of gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and svelte, with an excellent core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, ripe, buried acids and a very long, refined and nascently complex finish. This is a gorgeous wine in the making, but it will need some proper bottle age to blossom and start hitting on all cylinders. As I am tasting the 2019 Frauenberg five months later than I tasted the 2018 version, it is hard to make direct comparisons, as this wine has already begun to close up a bit after its bottling, but my gut instinct is that in due course, this will be every bit as stellar as the inaugural vintage of this bottling from Julian. 2029-2065+. **93+**.

2019 Ohligsberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs AP #14- Weingut Julian Haart

The 2019 vintage of the Ohligsberg GG from Julian Haart is stunningly expressive and complex right out of the blocks this year, with a flashy personality that I can never recall this wine having so early on in its evolution (though again, I am tasting this five months later than normal, thanks to the pandemic). The wine tips the scales at a suave thirteen percent octane and simply soars from the glass in a blend of gooseberry, grapefruit, black currant, a beautiful base of slate, a lovely touch of wild yeasts, citrus peel, lemongrass and a topnote of currant leaf. On the

palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and very refined in profile, with a great core of pristine fruit, stunning mineral drive and grip, a seamless girdle of acidity and perfect balance on the long, complex and truly stunning finish. This is a brilliant wine in the making. 2029-2065+. **95.**

2019 Goldtröpfchen Riesling Grosses Gewächs AP #15- Weingut Julian Haart

The 2019 Goldtröpfchen GG from Julian Haart is a touch lower in octane than the other two GGs in the cellar this year, as this wine comes in listed at 12.5 percent alcohol. This falls in between the Frauenberg and the Ohligsberg in terms of how much it has closed down since bottling, as it is not quite as reticent as the former right now, but it is not wearing its heart on its sleeve today, as is the Ohligsberg. However, it shares the same precision and stunning purity of both those wines, as it delivers a bouquet of pink grapefruit, blood orange, a hint of cassis, wild yeasts, dried flowers, a beautiful base of salty minerality, gentle smokiness and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and seamlessly balanced, with a superb core, great minerality and cut, a zesty spine of acidity and laser-like focus on the very long, precise and complex finish. This is another truly great GG in the making. 2030-2070+. **95+.**



2019 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett AP #6- Weingut Julian Haart

The Goldtröpfchen Kabinett AP #6 is festooned with a red label, while the old vines Kabinetten have white labels in 2019. However, as Julian notes, “all of the Kabinett wines have nearly the same analysis, with about 82-84 Oechsle must-weight, acidity levels all around ten grams per liter and residual sugars for these three wines plus or minus forty-five grams per liter.”

The AP #6 Kabinett comes in at 8.5 percent octane and offers up a pure and very youthful bouquet of pear, cassis, a gorgeous base of slate minerality, iris blossoms, a whisper of menthol, wild yeasts and a bit of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and filigreed, with a superb core of fruit, a real sense of crunchy dry extract, great mineral drive and grip, racy acids and a long, nascently complex and electric finish. This is absolutely brilliant! 2026-2075. **96.**

2019 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett Alte Reben AP #7- Weingut Julian Haart

The 2019 Goldtröpfchen Alte Reben Kabinett AP #7 is a whisper higher in octane than the regular bottling, coming in at nine percent. The bouquet is every bit as youthful as the wine above, but at the same time, just a touch more precise in all its facets, offering up a blend of gooseberry, cassis, bee pollen, a superb foundation of slate, white lilies, lilacs, a bit of beeswax and a lovely touch of salinity as a topnote. On the palate the wine is delicate, refined and medium-bodied, with stunning intensity of flavor and bounce, a blade of minerality, laser-like focus and a very, very long, complex and very promising, youthful finish. This is more refined than the younger vine version, but every bit as filigreed, vibrant and endless on the backend. 2026-2075. **98.**

2019 Wintricher Ohligsberg Riesling Kabinett Alte Reben AP #8- Weingut Julian Haart

The old vine bottling from the Ohligsberg vineyard in Wintrich is another absolutely breathtakingly pure and precise Kabinett from the 2019 vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a sophisticated mix of gooseberry, pear, fresh lime, currant leaf, shimmering slate minerality, bee pollen, white lilies and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is precise, medium-bodied and dancing, with great purity and mineral drive, lovely intensity of flavor and lightness of step, ripe, snappy acids and stunning focus and grip on the long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. The backend lift here is stunning. Kabinett simply does not get any better than these three examples from Julian Haart! 2024-2075. **98.**

Weingut Peter Lauer (Ayl)

Florian Lauer has made an absolutely superb range of 2019ers. I was fortunate to be able to taste eight of his wines from the vintage here in New York, as his importer, Stephen Bitterolf, generously offered to hand off his sample bottles from the estate to me when I was picking up my samples from Weingut Keller and Weingut Haart (that had been sent over on his container), and we synchronized our schedules so Stephen could pick up the open bottles the next morning and taste them the following day. Such are the crazy necessities of the pandemic, as we would normally have just happily sat down together and tasted all the wines at the same table! While the eight wines I tasted from Florian were absolutely superb (and amongst the very finest wines I have ever tasted from this superb Ayl estate), keep in mind that he has also crafted four different Grosses Gewächs in 2019 that could not yet be shipped, and may well be the pinnacle of his glowing success in this vintage! In addition to the GGs and the wines that I tasted and review below, Florian has also crafted another Ayler Kupp Kabinett and, two different “Two Star” Spätlesen, all of which will be offered up at the auction in Trier in late September. I have to imagine that those three wines will also be stunning and will be well worth making an attempt to purchase through one of the Wine Commissioners handling the auction this year in Trier. 2019 is clearly a great, great vintage in the Lauer family’s cellars and I recommend these wines very highly indeed!

2019 Ayl Riesling “Faß 4”- Weingut Peter Lauer (screwcap)

The 2019 Ayl Riesling “Faß 4” from Florian Lauer comes in at 9.5 percent alcohol this year and carries 34.2 grams per liter of residual sugar, to buffer its 9.3 grams per liter of acidity. The wine delivers a superb aromatic constellation in 2019, offering up scents of gooseberry, lime peel, wild yeasts, a salty base of slate minerality, wild yeasts and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and perfectly balanced, with a fine girdle of acidity, excellent focus and grip and a long, vibrant and classy finish. This is simply an outstanding “entry level” bottling from Florian in 2019, and perhaps the most seamless use of the screwcap I have tasted from the vintage, as the finish’s texture here is excellent! 2020-2045. **91.**

2019 Ayler Kupp Riesling Faß 6 “Senior”- Weingut Peter Lauer

As I mentioned last year, the “Senior” cuvée from Florian Lauer is one of his “village wine” bottlings, though the fruit for this wine hails entirely from the grand cru Ayler Kupp vineyard. The wine comes in at 11.5 percent octane in 2019, carries 7.6 grams per liter of acidity and 13.6 grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of tart orange, pink grapefruit, wild yeasts, a beautiful base of slate minerality, lemongrass, citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a rock solid core of fruit, superb mineral drive and cut, excellent focus and a long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This is a “village wine” the way Jean-François Coche used to make them! 2020-2060. **93.**

2019 Stirn Riesling “Faß 15”- Weingut Peter Lauer

The Stirn parcel in the Kupp vineyard is right up at the top of the slope, where there is very little topsoil and the wind always plays a role in its microclimate. The vines in this parcel are sixty-four years of age. The 2019 Stirn is fairly low in octane, coming in at 9.5 percent and carries thirty-eight grams per liter of residual sugar and 9.5 grams per liter of acidity. The wine delivers gorgeous complexity in its vibrant bouquet of grapefruit, tart orange, loads of salinity in its foundation of slate minerality, dried flowers, a touch of wild yeasts and some upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a beautiful touch of Spätlese-level residual sweetness to buffer its considerable acidity. The wine has a great core, superb mineral undertow and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and electric finish. I love this wine’s personality this year and am so happy Florian did not try to ferment it up a bit higher in octane to dry it out a bit more, as its balance is absolute perfection. 2020-2060+. **94.**

2019 Kern Riesling “Faß 9”- Weingut Peter Lauer

As I mentioned last year in my note on the 2018, the *lieu à dit* of Kern is a top to bottom slice of the Kupp vineyard that sits on the western side of the hillside, with a southwesterly exposition. It is planted with seventy-four year-old vines. The 2019 Kern also comes in at 9.5 percent alcohol, sports 9.5 grams per liter of acidity and 39.2 grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine in 2019 shows off beautiful depth and complexity in its nose of lemon, pink grapefruit, wild yeasts, a very complex base of slate, citrus peel, lemongrass and a topnote of *fleur de sel*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a great core of fruit, a lovely buffer of residual sweetness, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This too has electric acidity perfectly complemented by its level of residual sweetness. It is a touch more broad-shouldered than the Stirn (due to its generous serving of afternoon sunshine), perhaps a touch sweeter, but every bit as refined and light on its feet. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2060+. **94.**



2019 Ayler Kupp Riesling Kabinett “Faß 8”- Weingut Peter Lauer

Florian Lauer’s 2019 “Faß 8” Kabinett from the Kupp is a beautiful example of just how blessed this vintage was in particular for this Prädikat level. The wine is eight percent alcohol, carries 9.5 grams per liter of acidity and is balanced perfectly with 51 grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine offers up a lovely, refined bouquet of gooseberry, lime, salty slate minerality, bee pollen, a touch of citrus peel and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and fresh as well water, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine mineral drive and cut, ripe, seamless acids and a long, complex and still quite youthful finish. This is already delicious, but it is still clearly quite primary in personality and I would be inclined to give it at least a handful of years in the cellar and let its secondary layers of complexity emerge. An absolutely classic example of Kabinett. 2024-2060. **93.**

2019 Ayler Lambertskirch Riesling Kabinett AP #14 - Weingut Peter Lauer

The Lambertskirch vineyard lies south of the Kupp, right on a curve of the Saar River, looking across at the town of Ockfen. Florian Lauer has a small parcel here, which he cleared and replanted several years ago and the vines are now ten years of age. His 2019 Lambertskirch Kabinett is a whisper higher in alcohol than the Kupp Kabinett, coming in at 8.5 percent and is balanced with 55.6 grams per liter of residual sugar. The acidity here is 8.3 grams per liter. The wine delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of apple, a touch of tangerine, a fine base of slate, citrus peel, dried flowers, a touch of wild yeasts and plenty of upper register salinity. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and a bit sweeter than the Kupp Kabinett, with lovely

balance and grip, bright, snappy acids and excellent focus on the long and zesty finish. This is not quite as ethereal and filigreed as the Kupp Kabinett, but it is still a lovely wine in its own right. 2020-2055. **92.**

2019 Ayler Kupp Riesling Spätlese “Faß 7” - Weingut Peter Lauer

The 2019 Faß 7 Kupp Spätlese is another excellent wine from Florian Lauer in this vintage. The wine is eight percent alcohol, carries 93 grams per liter of residual sugar and 9.4 grams per liter of acidity. The wine is already very expressive on the nose, jumping from the glass in a beautiful blend of fresh pineapple, white cherry, lovely slate soil tones, citrus blossoms and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and succulent, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral undertow, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is a truly delicious wine today, but it is still a puppy and far more complexity will emerge with bottle age. However, in its bloom of exuberant, youthful charm, it is pretty hard to resist already! 2020-2060+. **92+.**

2019 Ayler Kupp Riesling Auslese “Faß 10”- Weingut Peter Lauer

Florian Lauer’s 2019 Faß 10 Auslese from the Kupp vineyard is another very strong example of the vintage, with a very refined glazing of botrytis giving the wine an exotic bouquet of pineapple, tangerine, a hint of mango, honeycomb, a fine touch of minerality, orange blossoms and violets. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, racy and vivid, with a lovely core, great mineral drive and cut, fine focus, excellent complexity and a long, beautifully balanced and electric finish. Its technical details this year are 7.65 percent octane, 104 grams per liter of residual sugar and 9.2 grams per liter of acidity. This is the least open wine in the range of 2019ers that I tasted from the estate, so I would definitely tuck it away for a full decade and let it unfold properly. There is plenty here lurking just below the surface, and a decade down the road, my score could well seem a bit conservative! 2030-2080. **93+.**

Weingut Alfred Merkelbach (Ürzig)

I have never had the pleasure to visit the Merkelbach brothers at their winery in Ürzig, but I have long admired their utterly classical, filigreed style of wines. In fact, it was really a bottle of their 1985 Kinheimer Rosenberg Kabinett that “turned the light on” for me regarding the beauty of German wines, many, many years ago, and I have been in love with this country’s beautiful mosaic of wines and regions ever since. When I knew that I was going to have to put together a report this summer based both on the 2019ers that had been sent to me from Germany from some of the estates that visit each year, coupled with 2018ers from estates I had not visited last spring while in German wine country, I immediately thought this would be an opportunity to redress a wrong in not having covered the Merkelbach wines previously and reached out to their American importer, Michael Skurnik, to see about getting samples. The firm very generously sent me a fine range of the 2018ers from the Merkelbach brothers, as well as fairly broad sampling of the estate’s 2019ers, which had just arrived here in New York. I report on the 2018ers below, with the other Mosel estates from that vintage.

Alfred Jr. is the older of the two Merkelbach brothers, having taken over the estate from his ailing father all the way back in 1951, when he was only fourteen years of age! His brother Rolf joined him a couple of years later and the two brothers have been working side by side now since the mid-1950s. The two brothers have made wines together for decade after decade since those days, and 2019 is the very first vintage where they have not done absolutely everything themselves, which is pretty remarkable, considering that they are both now in their eighties! In

2019, they accepted a bit of assistance from Johannes Selbach and his team, allowing the two brothers to take on more of a consultancy role in this vintage, rather than do all the heavy lifting and vineyard work themselves- as befits gentlemen in their eighties, particularly given the fact that Alfred Jr. was celebrating his sixty-eighth harvest in 2019! Tasting these 2019ers a week or so after working through their lineup of beautiful 2018ers, it seems quite clear that the style and quality have not changed at all here with the addition of a few more pairs of younger hands available to help in the vineyards and cellars, and the 2019ers remain absolutely true to the beautiful, filigreed house style here that has prevailed probably since the 1951 vintage!



2019 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett AP #5- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The 2019 Ürziger Würzgarten Kabinett AP #5 from Weingut Merkelbach comes in at eight percent octane and offers up a beautifully classic bouquet of lime, strawberry, slate minerality, bee pollen, a nice touch of white flowers and a topnote of iris blossom. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-bodied, vibrant and filigreed, with a lovely foundation of slate minerality, a juicy core, a fine girdle of acidity and excellent focus and grip on the long, delicate and energetic finish. This is a classic Kabinett. 2020-2050. **92+**.

2019 Kinheimer Rosenberg Riesling Spätlese AP #1- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The 2019 Spätlese AP #1 from the Rosenberg vineyard from the Merkelbachs is a beautifully refined example of the vintage, with the nose wafting from the glass in a nascently complex blend of pear, white cherry, violets, rose petals, slate and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and vibrant, with a good core, fine soil signature and grip, zesty acids and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is still a youthful wine and I would opt to give it a bit of bottle age, just so it can uncoil from behind its fine spine of acidity and really express itself. 2023-2055. **91**.

2019 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese AP #7- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The 2019 Würzgarten Spätlese AP #7 from Weingut Merkelbach is a touch more aromatically expressive out of the blocks than the Rosenberg Spätlese, with the bouquet delivering a fine constellation of strawberries, pear, a lovely base of minerality, lilacs, violets, bee pollen and a topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and zesty, with fine filigree and focus, a lovely core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip and a long, vibrant and still fairly youthful finish. This has great structure for long-term aging, but also has excellent lightness of step. 2023-2060. **92.**

2019 Kinheimer Rosenberg Riesling Auslese AP #3- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The 2019 Rosenberg Auslese AP #3 from the Merkelbach brothers (with a little help from their friends) is a beautiful wine, offering up a bright and shimmering bouquet of apple, white cherry, a refined base of slate, orange zest, violets and apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and succulent on the attack, with a good spine of acidity, a lovely core, fine mineral drive and a long, lifted and nascently complex finish. This is marvelously light on its feet for Auslese and absolutely true to the house style here! 2025-2065. **92.**

2019 Kinheimer Rosenberg Riesling Auslese AP #4- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The 2019 Auslese AP #4 from the Kinheimer Rosenberg vineyard is also a nicely filigreed example of its Prädikat level. The refined nose wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, fresh pineapple, lovely minerality, a hint of honeycomb, iris blossoms, violets and a bit of bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and gently glazed, with a lovely core of fruit, bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, youthfully complex and very well-balanced finish. This is more closed today than the AP #3 version and will want just a bit longer in the cellar to start to stir. 2027-2065. **92+.**

2019 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese AP #8- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The 2019 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese AP #8 from Weingut Alfred Merkelbach is beautifully expressive aromatically right out of the blocks, offering up a pure and complex constellation of strawberries, lychee nut, bee pollen, lime zest, rosewater, gorgeous minerality, lilacs and the first hints of the honeycomb to arrive with a bit of bottle age. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and nicely glazed, with zesty acids, excellent focus and grip, a good mineral undertow and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This too is impressively light on its feet, but it has outstanding intensity of flavor. 2025-2065+. **94.**

2019 Ürziger Würzgarten “Urglück” Riesling Auslese AP #10- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The Urglück section of the Würzgarten is the Merkelbachs’ filet section, still planted with ungrafted old vines. The 2019 Urglück Auslese AP #10 from Weingut Merkelbach seems to have just about the same stylish veneer of very clean botrytis as the AP #8, but the wine seems even more precise from the non-grafted vines. The bouquet delivers a vibrant blend of pineapple, strawberries, honeycomb, lovely minerality, violets, lime zest and a touch of citrus blossom. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and more reserved behind its girdle of acidity than the AP #8 version, with a lovely core, fine transparency and bounce, excellent focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and bouncy finish. Give this a bit more time in the cellar to blossom, as it will be outstanding when it is ready truly ready to drink. 2027-2065+. **94.**

Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter (Mülheim)

Constantin Richter has made a stellar range of 2019ers. In particular, the four Kabinetten I tasted from the estate this year stood out as truly exceptional in quality and perfectly showcase how superb the growing conditions were in 2019 to produce Kabinett. The

estate got rolling with picking in mid-September with pinot noir grapes for sparkling wines, and, as Constantin notes, “already some grapes for our Kabinetten” during this first week of harvest. The picking was completed during four weeks, with sorting out in the vineyards for sunburnt grapes requiring fully twenty percent of the crop was left behind from the heat spike of early August. Constantin Richter noted that “the harvest in general was quite ‘uneventful’ and really nice from a grower’s perspective- you just had to finish in time before the rain started in the second week of October and watered down the previously perfect grapes.” While the Kabinetten of 2019 are truly exceptional this year from the estate, I am sure that everything here has turned out beautifully. Due to the constraints of shipping samples, I only received one Spätlese from the vintage (I assume there are several more in the cellars here), but the lineup of Auslesen was more complete, as the three 2019ers from the Prädikat level that Constantin included in the case of samples were truly stunning- all with a touch of very clean and beautiful botrytis synthesized with the crunchy purity of lots of golden berries. I have been rather late to start visiting Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter in Mülheim, as I was only introduced to their wines during the Mythos Mosel events in 2018, but this is quickly becoming one of my absolutely favorite estates in the middle Mosel and Constantin Richter’s 2019ers are amongst the very finest wines to be found in this stunning vintage! For lovers of classically ethereal, filigreed middle Mosel Rieslings, this is now one of the very best addresses in the entire region and I cannot think of a better vintage to start laying these wines down in the cellar in proper quantity than the legendary year of 2019!



Awaiting the sunset at the Max Ferdinand Richter estate, after a late afternoon shower cleared up last April.

2019 Richter Dry Riesling AP #7- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter (screwcap)

The Estate Dry Riesling from Constantin Richter is made from the younger vines (under twenty-five years-old) in his top vineyard holdings in the villages of Brauneberg, Erden and Mülheim. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in *fuder* and then aged in stainless steel, prior to bottling in April. The residual sugar of the 2019 version is five grams per liter and the acidity is seven grams per liter. The bottling offers up a refined nose of lime, gooseberry, slate, citrus peel and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, complex and beautifully balanced, with bright, buried acids, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and quite wide open finish. This is a very tasty “entry level” dry Riesling! 2020-2040+. **88.**

2019 Riesling “Classic” AP #4- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter (screwcap)

The 2019 Riesling “Classic” from Constantin Richter is made from decidedly older vines than the Richter Dry bottling, as these vines average fifty years of age and are all from the villages of Mülheim, Velden and Burgen. The wine is still officially a dry wine in the 2019 vintage, as it has ten grams per liter of residual sugar, with acids at nine grams per liter. The 2019 Classic is a fine follow-up to the lovely 2018 version, delivering a refined aromatic constellation of green apple, tart orange, lime, a complex base of slate, a nice hint of botanicals and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and racy, with a rock solid core (from the old vines), lovely mineral drive and grip and a long, snappy and complex finish. This is truly excellent this year and is a great value! 2020-2045+. **90+.**

2019 Richter Estate Riesling AP #2- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter (screwcap)

The 2019 Richter Estate Riesling is again made from younger vines, like the Dry Riesling bottling (with a bit of Graacher Himmelreich included this year) and is fermented and aged similarly to that bottling. The 2019 Estate Riesling comes in at ten percent octane, carries twenty-five grams per liter of residual sugar and has eight grams per liter of acidity, so this is like a Kabinett in sweetness level this year. The wine delivers a very expressive bouquet of lime peel, pear, a nice touch of Brauneberg-like botanicals, a good base of slate and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, fine mineral drive and bounce, zesty acids and a long, complex and succulent finish. This is drinking beautifully out of the blocks, but has the balance to also age gracefully. 2020-2040+. **89+.**

2019 Veldenzer Elisenberg Riesling Kabinett AP #12- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter

The Richters’ *monopole* vineyard of the Elisenberg has turned out a beautiful Kabinett in 2019. Most of the fruit for this bottling was picked right at the start of harvest, but Constantin reports that some juice from late in the harvest was also included to get the proper balance of fruit to acidity in the finished wine. The wine ended up with fifty-two grams per liter of residual sugar and 9.5 grams per liter of acidity. It is beautifully expressive on the nose, jumping out of the glass in a beautiful blend of lime, gooseberry, citrus blossoms, a fine base of minerality, a hint of menthol and a topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied, complex and vibrant, with a lovely core, fine filigree and bounce, a lovely girdle of acidity and a long, classy and energetic finish. 2020-2050+. **92.**

2019 Brauneberg Juffer Riesling Kabinett AP #13- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter

The 2019 Brauneberg Juffer Riesling Kabinett AP #13 from Max Ferdinand Richter is another truly excellent example of the vintage. The wine is similarly balanced to the Elisenberg Kabinett, though with a touch less acidity, so also a bit less residual sugar to find that perfect inflection point. The residual sugar here is forty-five grams per liter and acidity is nine grams per

liter in 2019. The bouquet is pure and vibrant, offering up a classic combination of pear, lime, cress, a lovely base of slate, a wisp of smokiness, dried flowers and a touch of mint in the upper register. On the palate is medium-bodied, bright and perfectly balanced, with lovely acids and grip, impeccable focus, fine intensity of flavor and complexity and a long, zesty and lifted finish. This is a gorgeous Kabinett! 2020-2050+. **93+**.

2019 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett AP #11- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter

The 2019 Himmelreich Kabinett from Constantin Richter is so pure, precise and filigreed that one could not ask for a more beautiful expression of this magical *terroir*. Surprisingly, as it certainly does not taste this way, this is the lowest acid of these four stunning Kabinetten, as it comes in at nine grams per liter and was balanced with fifty grams per liter of residual sugar. The bouquet leaps from the glass in a vibrant blend of tangerine, lime, complex, slate minerality, lilacs, a touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is bright, pure and transparent, with a medium-bodied personality, a fine girdle of acidity, excellent focus and complexity and a long, refined and vibrant finish. This is stunning. 2020-2050+. **94+**.

2019 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett AP #10- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter

The Richter family has some of the very oldest vines in the Wehlener Sonnenuhr, as their parcel right under the sundial were planted back in the nineteenth century, and some of these ancient vines were used for this superb Kabinett in 2019. This is the highest acid Kabinett in the cellars this year, carrying ten grams per liter and was balanced with forty-seven grams per liter of residual sugar. The bouquet is young, complex and vibrant, offering up a vivid blend of apple, pear, vanilla bean, a superb base of slate, bee pollen and a topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, snappy and laser-like in its focus, with great intensity of flavor and backend lift, fine slate undertow and a very long, pure, complex and electric finish. Superb juice. 2025-2055. **94+**.

2019 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #15- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter

The AP #15 Spätlese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr was the only wine at this Prädikat level that I tasted from Constantin this year, and it is a beauty. The technical details on this wine are ninety-five grams per liter of residual sugar and nine grams per liter of acidity; it is sourced entirely from the ancient vines the Richters own at the base of the sundial in this vineyard. The bouquet is bright and inviting, wafting from the glass in a classic blend of pear, nectarine, vanilla bean, spring flowers, slate and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and fullish, with a dreamy core of fruit, lovely slate undertow, bright acids and a long, complex and succulent finish. At 95°, this is into Auslese *Oechsle* levels, but retains its lightness of step and is flat out delicious! 2020-2060. **92**.

2019 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese AP #17- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter

The 2019 Himmelreich Auslese AP #17 from Max Ferdinand Richter is another very old vine bottling this year, as it hails from old vines in the Goldwingert section of this vineyard. It was made from about thirty percent gently botrytized bunches, with the remainder all golden berries, and it ended up landing at 115 grams per liter of residual sugar and ten grams per liter of acidity. The wine is beautifully precise and focused on the nose, offering up a fine constellation of pear, white cherry, citrus zest, honeycomb, a superb foundation of slate minerality, spring flowers and bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, vibrant and complex, with a stunning core of fruit, excellent acids and grip and a very long, refined and electric finish. This is a stunning young Auslese! It is certainly delicious right out of the blocks, but I would opt to forget it in a corner of the cellar until its tenth birthday and let all of its secondary layers of complexity emerge with some extended bottle age. 2029-2080+. **94**.

2019 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #18- Weingut Max Ferd Richter

The 2019 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese AP #18 is a beautifully glazed, botrytized wine of great purity and depth. Interestingly, this is about twenty-five percent botrytized bunches this year, with all the rest made out of beautiful golden berries, so it has just a touch less botrytis than the above Auslese. Its technical details are 115° *Oechsle*, 125 grams per liter of residual sugar and 105 grams per liter of acidity. The bouquet offers up a stunning aromatic combination of lime, kiwi, orange, violets, a fine touch of slate, honeycomb, lilacs and violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and creamy on the attack, with a beautiful girdle of acidity, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and vibrant finish. Fine, fine juice. 2026-2080+. **93.**

2019 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese * Faß 42- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter**

The Faß 42 Three Star Auslese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr is another botrytis wine of great purity and beauty. This was made from a combination of the very old family vines around the sundial and a parcel of “third leaf” vines planted in a different section of the vineyard. Readers may recall that the very first crop from vines this age produce the finest fruit for the first twenty-five years of their plantation, and some legendary wines have been produced from “third leaf” fruit, such as the 1988 Herrenberg Auslese Fuder 153 from Maximin Grünhaus and the 1985 La Turque from Guigal. Constantin reports that the old vines had a very clean botrytis to their bunches and the young vines were all beautifully ripe, golden berries. The numbers here ended up as 140° *Oechsle*, 150 grams per liter of residual sugar and eleven grams per liter of acidity. There is quite a bit more noble rot influence on the nose here than in the Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese, but the same aromatic precision, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a blend of tangerine, pineapple, honeycomb, a lovely touch of vanilla, slate, orange blossoms and citrus zest. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and zesty, with great purity of fruit on the attack, a bottomless core, lovely mineral undertow, a wonderful vein of acidity and impeccable balance on the very, very long, complex and perfectly focused finish. This is simply stunning! 2027-2080+. **95.**

2019 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese AP #6- Max Ferdinand Richter

The 2019 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese from Constantin Richter is a brilliant young example of the vintage. The wine came in at 210° *Oechsle*, ended up with 340 grams per liter of residual sugar and acids of sixteen grams per liter- the statistical breakdown of a dessert wine that will simply live forever! The bouquet offers up a celestial blend of pineapple, guava, apricot, honey, orange zest and a wide array of fruit blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and electric on the backend, with a bottomless core of fruit, a very clean glazing of botrytis and superb focus and balance on the long, complex and vibrant finish. This is gorgeous. 2020-2100. **96.**

2018 Pinot Noir AP #55- Weingut Max Ferdinand Richter

This is the first vintage I have ever tasted of the pinot noir from Constantin Richter, and I suppose the warm summer of 2018 is probably a perfect year to start with the Spätburgunder here. The wine is nicely ripe this year, coming in at thirteen percent octane and offers up a deep and youthfully complex nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, a hint of fresh herb tones and a superb base of grey slate. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, great mineral drive and grip, moderate, buried tannins and a long, promising finish. This needs some bottle age to really blossom, but I really like the constituent components here and would love to drink this wine six to eight years down the road. Most impressive. 2026-2055+. **90.**

Weingut Willi Schaefer (Graach)

Christophe and Andrea Schaefer have crafted an amazing lineup of 2019ers, with everything that I tasted, up and down the Prädikat hierarchy gorgeously pure, electric and bursting with some of the most beautiful fruit tones one will ever find in the world of wine. The vintage at Weingut Schaefer also produced a Grosses Gewächs bottling from the Himmelreich vineyard this year, but as my samples were shipped long before the official September release date for GGs, I did not have a chance to taste it. However, everything that I did taste from the estate is pure magic in 2019, and this was probably the most exciting full collection of 2019ers that I tasted in preparing this report. The basic, entry level wines were both very high in quality in 2019 (though sealed under screwcaps, at least for the American market). The pair of shimmering, dancing Kabinetten that I tried (one each from the Himmelreich and Domprobst vineyards) were flawless in their effortless and weightless beauty. The Himmelreich Kabinett held up in my fridge for fully a week after it was opened, and the last glass was every bit as glorious as the first! I sampled five different Spätlesen as well this year, one each from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr and Himmelreich vineyards, and three from the Domprobst. All were sensational and the Domprobst Spätlese AP #13, which will be sold in the auction in Trier later this month, was probably perfect (but given as demand is always so strong for that wine at the auction and the estate invariably has to add cases to the availability to keep the price from going insanely high, I have scored the wine conservatively, only giving it “98”). There are also five brilliant Auslesen in the cellars this year, but unfortunately, my sample of the Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese was corked, so there are only tasting notes on four of these legends in the making. And the Domprobst Beerenauslese from 2019 is the pinnacle of the collection at Weingut Schaefer this year and every bit as stunning as one would expect from the confluence of a legendary vintage and an estate at the absolute top of its game today! Buy any bottling you can find from Christophe Schaefer this year, as there is absolutely nothing in the portfolio that will not be a cellar treasure in times to come.

2019 Graacher Riesling Trocken AP #6- Weingut Willi Schaefer (screwcap)

The 2019 Graacher Riesling Trocken AP #6 from Christophe Schaefer comes in at 11.5 percent octane and offers up a beautifully expressive nose of tart orange, apple, a superb base of slate minerality, white flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and racy, with an impressive core of pure fruit, fine mineral drive and cut, bright acids and a long, complex and wide open finish. There is a slight textural degradation on the finish from the screwcap, when comparing this to the cork-sealed wines, but it is very, very slight right now, and for drinking over the next several years, I suspect that most tasters will not even notice it. This is an outstanding “entry level” Trocken! 2020-2035. **90.**

2019 Graacher Riesling Feinherb AP #7- Weingut Willi Schaefer (screwcap)

The 2019 Graacher Feinherb bottling is only a touch lower in octane than the Trocken, as this wine comes in at eleven percent alcohol in this vintage. The bouquet is vibrant and complex, delivering scents of lime, tart orange, complex base of salty minerality, orange peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, youthful and still fairly closed right now, with a lovely core, a nice buffering of residual sweetness (though this remains essentially a dry wine), bright acids and a long, moderately reserved and nascently complex finish. I love the underlying wine here, but I get the sense that the closure is working against the wine right now, as it is more clamped down on the backend than the Graacher Trocken and will demand some decanting time before drinking. This could simply be a function of the wine being closed down after its

relatively recent bottling, or it could be the screwcap. It will be interesting to follow its evolution over the next couple of years. If it is just closed, post-bottling, the score should track at the higher limit of the range. 2020-2035. **87-90.**

2019 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett AP #2- Weingut Willi Schaefer

Christophe Schaefer's 2019 Himmelreich Kabinett AP #2 is an absolutely brilliant young wine. The nose wafts from the glass in a crystal clear blend of lime, green apple, a strong vein of slate salinity, a touch of wild yeasts, bee pollen and a topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, complex and beautifully balanced, with a succulent core of absolutely pristine fruit, a lovely girdle of acidity, great focus and grip and a long, vibrant and complex finish. The backend of this wine is simply electric. Stunning juice. 2020-2060. **96.**

2019 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Kabinett AP #3- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2019 Domprobst Kabinett AP #3 from the Schaefer family is another absolutely stunning young wine. The bouquet is pure, precise and very promising, offering up scents of pear, tart orange, wild yeasts, a beautiful and deep base of slate, a touch of iris blossom and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and medium-full, with a superb core of fruit, classic Domprobst mineral drive, bright, zesty acids and impeccable balance and grip on the long, focused and nascently complex finish. As is typical of the Domprobst, this wine is not as expressive as the Himmelreich Kabinett out of the blocks and will demand some time in the cellar to blossom, but it will be another great wine with some bottle age. 2026-2060+. **95.**



2019 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #8- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2019 Himmelreich Spätlese AP #8 from the Schaefer family is a really classic and flat out delicious example of its Prädikat level and *terroir*. The wine comes in at 7.5 percent alcohol and offers up a vibrant, complex bouquet of lime, tangerine, lovely slate minerality, bee pollen, apple blossoms and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and succulent on the attack, with a lovely core, fine mineral drive and focus, bright acids and a long, complex and seamlessly balanced, bouncy finish. This is simply gorgeous wine. 2020-2065+. **95.**

2019 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese AP #10- Weingut Willi Schaefer

Christophe Schaefer's 2019 Domprobst Spätlese AP #10 is a bit more reserved out of the blocks than the Himmelreich Spätlese, but that is the nature of the Domprobst. However, it shares the same beautiful purity and precision of the Himmelreich example, eventually delivering scents of apple, pear, a refined base of slate, just a whisper of honeycomb, a touch of lime zest, lilacs and iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and medium-full, with great soil signature, zesty acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, refined and perfectly balanced finish. This is still quite primary in personality, but there is plenty of complexity waiting to unfold and in due course, this too will be stunning juice. 2025-2065+. **94.**

2019 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #17- Weingut Willi Schaefer

It is so nice to see two different wines from the Schaefer family's small holdings in Wehlener Sonnenuhr this year. The 2019 Spätlese offers up a beautiful aromatic constellation of pear, orange, vanilla bean, fruit blossoms, slate and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex, vibrant and seamlessly balanced, with a lovely core, fine slate undertow, a lovely girdle of acidity and excellent focus and grip on the very long, very pure and dancing finish. One can taste the Indian Summer in this wine. Another truly stunning Spätlese! 2022-2065+. **95.**

2019 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese AP #5- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2019 Domprobst Spätlese AP #5 from the Schaefer family is a touch richer in personality than the AP #10 from the same vineyard, but not with retaining the same beautiful filigree of classic Spätlese. The bouquet is deep, precise and quite expressive for a young Domprobst, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, fresh apricot, orange blossoms, slate, incipient notes of honeycomb, violets and a topnote of lime zest. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, complex and perfectly balanced, with bright acids, lovely focus and bounce and a long, refined and juicy finish. This is another gorgeous Spätlese. It is as approachable out of the blocks as the Himmelreich Spätlese, but given this *terroir's* propensity to close down for long aging, I have to believe that this is a brief window of accessibility before it settles in for a bit of hibernation before really starting to stretch its wings. So try it over the next year, or bury it for another six or seven years before starting to drink it in earnest. 2020-2070+. **95+.**

2019 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Spätlese AP #13 (Auction)- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2019 Domprobst Auction Spätlese AP #13 from Christophe Schaefer is pure magic. The bouquet is just stunning, jumping from the glass in a blaze of lime, pear, tangerine, salty slate minerality, violets, lilacs, orange zest and a lovely topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is medium-full and more reserved in personality today than the nose would suggest, with a great core of fruit, stellar mineral undertow, bright, buried acids and laser-like focus on the long, nascently complex, seamlessly balanced and completely effortless finish. While this wine is still a bit primary on the palate, it is incredibly long and precise and once it is ready to drink, it seems likely to be one of the very best wines of this great vintage. 2026-2070+. **98.**

2019 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese AP #11- Weingut Willi Schaefer

There are three distinct Auslesen from the Domprobst in this vintage, with AP #11 being the least botrytized in personality (though certainly still with a beautiful glazing). The bouquet here wafts from the glass in a gorgeous blend of pear, pineapple, a hint of the yellow plum to come, a lovely vein of slate, honey, iris blossoms and white lilies. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, fullish and vibrant, with a superb core of fruit, bright acids, excellent focus and balance and impressive lift on the nascently complex, youthful and very promising finish. This is a gorgeous wine in the making, but like most examples from the Domprobst vineyard, it will demand a full decade's worth of bottle age to start to really hit on all cylinders. 2029-2085+. **94+**.

2019 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese AP #9- Weingut Willi Schaefer

This is the only Auslese from the Himmelreich from Christophe Schaefer in 2019 and it is an absolute beauty. The wine offers up just stunningly clean botrytis notes in its aromatic constellation of peach, mango, orange, a nice pull of minerality, honeycomb, lime blossoms and citrus zest. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, very complex and zesty, with a great core, outstanding focus and grip, a lovely girdle of acidity and stunning length on the perfectly balanced and vibrant finish. This is brilliant Auslese! 2029-2085+. **97**.

2019 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese AP #14- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2019 AP #14 Auslese from the Domprobst is a bit more botrytized in personality than the AP #11 from the same vineyard, but like all of these Schaefer wines in this vintage, it is beautifully pure, precise and energetic on the palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a beautiful young blend of pear, fresh apricot, white cherry, a fine foundation of salty minerality, orange zest, honeycomb, violets and apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and vibrant, with a dreamy core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, ripe, buried acids, with laser-like focus, stunning complexity and grip and a long, electric finish. This is absolutely effortless in its shimmering beauty. 2027-2085+. **97**.

2019 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Auslese (Auction) AP #15- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2019 Auction Auslese bottling AP #15 from the Domprobst is the most beautifully botrytized of all the Auslesen in the cellar this year, but one has the sense that these were perfectly golden berries before the botrytis arrived. The bouquet is celestial, delivering a magical array of tangerine, mango, fresh apricot, citrus zest, honeycomb, a beautiful base of minerality, orange blossoms and violets. On the palate the wine is pure, complex, fullish and electric, with a great core of fruit, superb mineral drive and grip, a superb girdle of acidity and a very, very long, very complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is pure magic. 2030-2085+. **98+**.

2019 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Beerenauslese AP #16- Weingut Willi Schaefer

The 2019 Beerenauslese from the Domprobst from Christophe Schaefer is another stunningly beautiful wine and a marvelous summit for this amazing lineup of 2019ers. The bouquet is pure and utterly refined, wafting from the glass in a blend of white cherry, pineapple, tangerine, a hint of the yellow plum that will come with bottle age, a nice dollop of slate, citrus zest, honey, violets and a beautiful array of tropical floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is refined, fullish and complex, with seamless balance, laser-like focus, a marvelous core of fruit and a very, very long, elegant and dancing finish. This is so refined and effortless! It is still a young wine and I would not even consider opening a bottle for at least another six to eight years (despite it being absolutely delicious right now), as there is so much here, lurking just below the surface and waiting for bottle age to set it free! 2026-2085. **97**.

Weingut Schloss Lieser (Lieser)

Thomas Haag's beloved estate of Schloss Lieser is one of the larger in the middle Mosel, and with additional vineyard holdings having been added in recent years in such crown jewels as the Bernkasteler "Doctor", Piesporter "Goldtröpfchen", the Wehlener "Sonnenuhr", and Graacher "Domprobst" to augment their traditional fine holdings in the villages of Lieser and Brauneberg, tasting at the estate is a virtual trip to the finest vineyard sites up and down the Mosel River. But, with Covid rearing its ugly head, I was far more limited in my investigation of the Schloss Lieser lineup of 2019ers this year, with my samples focused on the traditional and original estate holdings in the vineyards of the Niederberg Helden in Lieser and the Juffer and Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyards in Brauneberg. The six wins that I tasted for this report are no doubt just the tip of the iceberg here in 2019, but as all ranged from excellent to stunningly brilliant, it is easy to come to the conclusion that Thomas Haag has not missed the opportunity that the 2019 vintage presented and has most likely crafted a stellar range of wines right across the board of all his excellent vineyard holdings. The Haag family had volunteered to organize a wider range of samples back in the spring, but ran into shipping issues from Germany to the US in the height of the pandemic's impact on the New York area, so their US importer kindly stepped into the breach and sent this lovely six pack of 2019ers to tide me over until the ways of the world lie open once again to thirsty American wine writers wishing to visit the estate in Lieser and see what other gems are buried here in the cellars!



2019 SL Riesling Trocken AP #1 - Weingut Schloss Lieser (screwcap)

The 2019 SL Estate Riesling Trocken from Thomas Haag is a beautifully refined wine on both the nose and palate. It comes in at 12.5 percent octane and offers up an expressive bouquet of lime, pink grapefruit, green apple, slate, a touch of petrol, wild yeasts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, complex and very well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine mineral drive and cut, snappy acids and impressive focus and grip on the long and complex finish. There is a slightly tensile aspect to the texture on the finish that is a result of the screwcap, so decant the wine thirty minutes before drinking. 2020-2040+. **90.**

2019 SL Estate Riesling Kabinett AP #4 - Weingut Schloss Lieser (screwcap)

The SL Estate Riesling Kabinett from Schloss Lieser comes in at nine percent octane this year, but I do not have the technical details regarding acidity or residual sugar for this bottling. The wine offers up a beautiful nose of lime, apple, a fine base of slate, a nice touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, complex and nicely mineral, with a good core, lovely filigree and grip and a long, zesty and quite classy finish. This is handling its screwcap better than the Estate Riesling Trocken bottling and does not need decanting prior to serving. A really strong, entry level Kabinett this year! 2020-2045. **90+.**

2019 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Kabinett AP #10 - Weingut Schloss Lieser

The 2019 Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Kabinett AP #10 from Thomas Haag is still quite youthful, with the bouquet offering up plenty of wild yeast personality in its aromatic constellation of lime, pear, tart orange, a lovely base of slate, a touch of Brauneberg mossiness and the aforementioned wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and juicy on the attack, with a lovely core, good filigree and mineral signature, zesty acids and lovely balance and grip on the long and complex finish. This is a delicious Kabinett. **92.**

2019 Lieser Niederberg Helden Riesling Spätlese AP #14 - Weingut Schloss Lieser

The estate's 2019 Niederberg Helden Riesling Spätlese AP #14 is outstanding this year. The wine offers up a very expressive bouquet of pear, white cherry, a hint of mossiness, lime blossoms, bee pollen, slate and a touch of elder flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, complex and beautifully balanced, with a lovely girdle of zesty acidity, a classy core of fruit, good slate undertow and a long, refined and vibrant finish. Classic Helden Spätlese. 2020-2055+. **92+.**

2019 Brauneberger Juffer Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #15 - Weingut Schloss Lieser

The 2019 Schloss Lieser Spätlese AP #15 from the Juffer-Sonnenuhr vineyard is another youthful example of its Prädikat level, but with stellar precision and depth and with a bit of bottle age, this is going to be one stunning wine! The bouquet wafts from the glass in a pristine mix of lime, apple, white cherry, a gorgeous base of slate, bee pollen, white lilies and a hint of the mossiness to come with extended bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full, focused and filigreed, with a fine core, lovely transparency and grip, zesty acids and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. As is always the case, this is a touch less broad-shouldered than the very good Helden Spätlese, with great refinement and potential for longevity. Great juice. 2020-2060+. **94.**

2019 Brauneberger Juffer Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #19 - Weingut Schloss Lieser

The 2019 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese AP #19 from Thomas Haag is a stunningly beautiful young wine. The bouquet is deep, pure and beautifully glazed with very clean botrytis, offering up a gorgeous blend of white cherries, pear, lime zest, a touch of honeycomb, a lovely foundation of minerality and a floral topnote redolent of lilacs and iris blossoms. On the palate

the wine is pure, fullish and electric, with an excellent core and lift, laser-like focus and a very long, vibrant and very complex finish. A stunning wine. 2027-2085. **96.**

Weingut Selbach-Oster (Zeltingen)

I tasted a simply superb range of 2019ers from Johannes Selbach this year, as he kindly organized a case to be sent from Zeltingen to New York for inclusion in this article. Like his 2018ers, the wines are loaded with pure and precise fruit tones, coupled to good levels of acidity and seemingly bottomless depth. As was the case with the 2018ers here, the 2019 wines are generally a touch bigger than their stated Prädikat levels, so that the Kabinetten would have been light Spätlesen a generation ago, and this carries up the hierarchy of ripeness levels, but this does not detract from the inherent beauty of each wine. All of Johannes' 2019 Kabinetten are sealed under screwcap, as he is convinced that the wines age gracefully at this Prädikat level under the screw and we are scheduled one day (if the ways of the world ever lie open again) to do a tasting of older Kabinetten out of his cellar that he has under screwcap, so he can educate me on how well these wines age under this type of closure. I will look forward to the tasting, but in the interim, I would have loved to have seen the lovely examples of Kabinett that I sampled here from 2019 with at least some of the bottles sealed under natural cork! But, they at least showed very well at the time of this writing. At the Spätlese and Auslese level, the Selbach-Oster wines are truly superb this year, with just glorious depth and purity to their fruit components, excellent undertow of minerality and good, sound girdles of acidity to add precision, clarity and lift on the finishes.

2019 Zeltinger Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken AP #7 - Selbach-Oster

The Kabinett Halbtrocken bottling from the Zeltinger Himmelreich from Johannes Selbach is a lovely wine, offering up a fine and youthful bouquet of apple, a touch of gooseberry, a hint of honeycomb, slate and a topnote of lime and iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and minerally in profile, with a lovely core, a fine girdle of acidity and a long, dry and complex finish. This comes in at 11.5 percent octane in 2019 and is really lovely. It is sealed under screwcap. 2020-2040+. **92+.**

2019 Graacher Domprobst Riesling Feinherb "Alte Reben" AP #12- Selbach-Oster

The old vine bottling of Feinherb from the Domprobst vineyard from Johannes Selbach is a Spätlese by Prädikat and comes in at twelve percent alcohol in this ripe vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of pear, white cherry, pink grapefruit, citrus blossoms, bee pollen, slate and a nice touch of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, a sound girdle of acidity and a long, complex and wide open finish. This is quite broad-shouldered, in the proper Domprobst fashion, but at least out of the blocks, it is not particularly reserved in personality and is quite tasty. It could close down with a bit of bottle age, but my gut feeling is that it will always drink with generosity. 2020-2050. **92.**

2019 Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Kabinett AP #25 – Weingut Selbach-Oster

The 2019 Schlossberg Kabinett from Selbach-Oster is really a very pretty example of the vintage, but this is more Spätlese in terms of weight and breadth of shoulder than classical Kabinett. However, this takes away nothing from the charm here on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a lovely blend of white cherry, white peach, a touch of wild yeasts, a refined base of slate, bee pollen and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and nicely filigreed, with good acids, fine focus and grip and a long,

complex and very nicely balanced finish. Think of this as a hybrid between Kabinett and Spätlese, but with personality to burn! It is sealed under a screwcap. 2020-2040+. **92.**



2019 Zeltinger Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett AP #6 – Weingut Selbach-Oster

The Zeltinger Himmelreich Kabinett AP #6 from Johannes Selbach is beautifully expressive aromatically, with more inherent elegance (as is customary) than the Schlossberg. It offers up a gorgeous nose of pear, apple, lime blossoms, slate, wild yeasts, lime zest and bee pollen. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and again, more Spätlese than true Kabinett, but with lovely balance and grip, excellent complexity and bounce and a long, focused and very classy finish. This too is sealed under screwcap (which breaks my heart), and took a little coaxing to open up. 2020-2040+. **93.**

2019 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #15- Weingut Selbach-Oster

The 2019 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Spätlese from Selbach-Oster is again, a bit more like an Auslese than a classic Spätlese, but it is a beautiful wine that offers up superb depth, aromatic complexity and impeccable balance to age, so what is not to like? The really refined bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pear, white cherry, a lovely base of salty slate minerality, wild yeasts, white flowers, bee pollen and a nice touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, complex and offers lovely filigree and backend lift, with fine focus and grip and a long, classy finish. This is a beautiful wine. 2020-2060. **94.**

2019 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese* AP #8- Weingut Selbach-Oster

The One Star Spätlese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr from Johannes Selbach is another truly beautiful example of the vintage. It offers up a pure, complex and vibrant nose of apple, pear, vanilla bean, a lovely base of slate, orange blossoms and a bit of bee pollen in the upper register. On the palate the wine is zesty, medium-full, focused and complex, with a great core of fruit, fine mineral drive and cut, a very good girdle of acidity and a long, bouncy and very refined finish. Just a lovely and succulent wine. 2020-2060. **94.**

2019 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese* AP #26- Weingut Selbach-Oster

The 2019 Auslese One Star from the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr is a beautifully glazed, elegant and vibrant bottle from Johannes Selbach. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a refined blend of pineapple, mango, pear, honeycomb, salty soil tones and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex, vibrant and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and very elegant finish. The botrytis here is very clean and the wine shows gorgeous backend lift and bounce. This is a beauty. 2025-2060+. **94.**

Weingut Daniel Vollenweider (Traben-Trarbach)

I absolutely love Daniel Vollenweider's wines, and somehow, I have not managed yet to visit him at his cellars in Traben-Trarbach (not for a lack of trying to schedule an appointment), as he is often travelling to his Asian distributors in March when I am on the Mosel visiting estates. This year, Daniel's American importer kindly shared samples of four of his 2019ers with me for this report, so I can report on a nice handful of his wines from the vintage, though the container with the real shipment of Daniel's 2019ers had not yet arrived here in New York. As these were the importer's own samples, I do not have any technical details on the four bottlings, nor information about when Daniel Vollenweider started to harvest or what was the range of wines he produced in this vintage. But, I am very grateful for the opportunity I was provided to taste these four superb wines!

2019 Wolfer Goldrube Riesling Kabinett AP #1- Weingut Daniel Vollenweider

The 2019 Goldrube Kabinett AP #1 from Daniel Vollenweider is absolutely gorgeous this year, offering up classic Kabinetten filigree and lightness of step. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a beautiful blend of apple, pear, a beautiful base of soil, bee pollen, gentle notes of wild yeasts and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely intensity of flavor, excellent lift and grip and a long, focused and perfectly balanced finish. This is lovely juice. 2020-2050+. **93.**

2019 Kröver Steffensberg Riesling Spätlese AP #5- Weingut Daniel Vollenweider

Daniel Vollenweider's 2019 Spätlese from the Steffensberg vineyard is beautifully precise on both the nose and palate. This is just a touch higher in alcohol than the Goldrube Spätlese, coming in at nine percent, versus 8.5 percent for the wine below, and so it is a touch drier in profile. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a very pretty mix of delicious apple, pear, spring flowers, slate, bee pollen and a touch of wild yeasts. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full, complex and soil-driven, with excellent acids, very good focus and grip and a long, complex finish. A fine bottle of Spätlese. 2020-2060. **92+.**

2019 Wolfer Goldrube Riesling Spätlese AP #2- Weingut Daniel Vollenweider

The 2019 Wolfer Goldrube Spätlese AP #2 from Weingut Vollenweider is another stellar example of this great vintage. The wine offers up a superb aromatic constellation of peach, a hint of fresh pineapple, a beautiful base of slate, gentle notes of honeycomb and a lovely array of

citrus blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, fullish and succulent on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, ripe, buried acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is so delicious out of the blocks that I suspect that many bottles will be drunk early on, but it has the underlying structural chassis to age long and very, very gracefully. Great juice. 2020-2060. **94.**

2019 Wolfer Goldrube Riesling Auslese AP #3- Weingut Daniel Vollenweider

The 2019 Auslese AP #3 from the Goldrube vineyard is truly stunning young wine. The nose is pure, refined and seems as influenced by golden berries as it does by clean botrytis, wafting from the glass in a complex assembly of pear, fresh pineapple, a touch of tangerine, honeycomb, wild yeasts, a nice touch of minerality and a topnote of tropical flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, racy and fullish, with excellent focus and grip, a snappy girdle of acidity, beautiful balance and bounce and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is a brilliant wine in the making, but it is young and really deserves at least eight to ten years in the cellar to let it stretch its wings properly. 2028-2080. **94+.**



Nahe 2019ers

Weingut Hermann Dönnhoff (Oberhausen)

Cornelius Dönnhoff has crafted a brilliant range of wines in the 2019 vintage. As I could not visit to taste here in March, the Dönnhoff family kindly packed up a broad range of 2019ers to ship to my home in New York so that I could get a snapshot of the vintage here. As is the case with other estates who sent 2019ers, the one down side of this approach is that it is not allowed

to show any of the Grosses Gewächs bottlings before the start of September, so even if they had been bottled earlier in the summer, they could not be sent. The family started picking in earnest on September 23rd of 2019 (having already brought in some pinot noir from the Höllenspfad vineyard earlier for their sparkling wine), just as the rainy weather patch arrived in the Nahe. The harvest was done intermittently, during the sunny periods between the light rainstorms for the next couple of weeks, until sunny skies again returned for the last two weeks of the harvest. During this period the evenings were quite cool, which was ideal for keeping acidities up and holding off the spread of rot that might have been brought about by the rains, so with breaks for bouts of rain and rigorous selection, the picking team was able to keep rolling and give Cornelius top flight fruit to work with in the cellars. As was the case elsewhere in Germany, the second and third weeks of October were perfect weather for the grapes, with sunny days that were not too hot, coupled with cool nights, and the back half of the crop was able to ripen to perfection. The last grapes were picked in the Brücke vineyard in Oberhäusern on October 22nd, making it a complete month of picking here at Weingut Dönnhoff. The resulting wines are stellar- tensile, perfectly ripe and very, very pure. The dry Rieslings that I tasted (below the level of Grosses Gewächs) are superb, and the Prädikat wines are also exceptional in quality and very classical in style. It is quite clear from the range of 2019ers that I tasted, this is a great, great vintage for the Dönnhoff family!

Dry Wines

2019 Dönnhoff Estate Riesling Trocken AP #9- Weingut Dönnhoff (screwcap)

The 2019 Estate Riesling Trocken is all sourced from fruit grown on volcanic soils in and around the village of Oberhäusern. The 2019 version comes in at 11.5 percent alcohol and offers up a beautifully refined bouquet of apple, tart orange, wild yeasts, floral tones redolent of iris blossoms and lilacs, a fine foundation of minerality and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and racy, with a fine core, outstanding mineral drive and grip and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. I loved the 2018 version of this wine, but the 2019 is even a touch more refined than that lovely bottle! 2020-2040. **90.**

2019 Tonschiefer Riesling Trocken AP #10- Weingut Dönnhoff (screwcap)

The fruit for the Tonschiefer Riesling bottling from the Dönnhoff family hails primarily from the Leistenberg vineyard in Oberhäusern, with its grey slate mineral foundation helping to define this wine's personality. The 2019 Tonschiefer comes in at twelve percent alcohol and delivers a fine aromatic constellation of lemon, sweet grapefruit, apple, lovely slate minerality, dried flowers, a touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, elegant and complex, with a full-bodied, racy profile, a fine core and outstanding cut and grip on the long, perfectly balanced finish. This is fine juice. 2020-2045. **91.**

2019 Kahlenberg "Erste Lage" Riesling Trocken AP #11- Weingut Dönnhoff

The Kahlenberg vineyard in Kreuznach is a due south facing slope with a soil foundation of gravelly loam, making it quite unique in terms of its soil composition in the pantheon of Dönnhoff vineyard holdings. The 2019 Kahlenberg Trocken is a svelte and utterly refined young Riesling, offering up a gorgeous bouquet of pink grapefruit, apple, orange peel, a complex base of soil tones, a touch of wild yeasts, fruit blossoms and a hint of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and laser-like, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, vibrant acids and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex and energetic finish. This is truly outstanding juice! 2020-2060. **92+.**

2019 Höllenspfad “Erste Lage” Riesling Trocken- Weingut Dönnhoff

The beautiful red sandstone of the Höllenspfad vineyard in Roxheim makes this another quite unique bottling in the Dönnhoff family’s lineup. This is a very steep slope and the vines here are between ten and forty years of age. The 2019 Höllenspfad Trocken is beautifully spicy on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet jumping from the glass in a fine mix of pink grapefruit, tart orange, a wide array of spice tones, complex minerality, lemongrass and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, an excellent girdle of acidity, lovely focus and grip and a long, minerally and nascently complex finish. Though this is the same 12.5 percent octane as the Kahlenberg Trocken, this is the more muscular wine this year and I would opt for giving it at least a few years in the cellar to let it blossom a bit more completely before entertaining ideas of drinking it. The wine will be outstanding in due course. 2024-2060. **92.**

Classic Off-Dry and Noble Sweet Wines

2019 Dönnhoff Estate Riesling AP #8- Weingut Dönnhoff (screwcap)

The 2019 Estate Riesling from Weingut Dönnhoff is traditionally finished in a Feinherb style, but I do not have the technical details on the wines this year. The wine offers up a lovely nose of apple, peach, tart orange, a complex base of soil (the vineyards sourced for this wine include volcanic and slate soils), citrus peel and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and complex, with a lovely core, fine mineral drive and grip, a fine girdle of acidity and a long, classy finish. This is really good. 2020-2040. **90.**

2019 Kreuznacher Krötenpfuhl Riesling Kabinett AP #3- Weingut Dönnhoff

The 2019 Krötenpfuhl Kabinett is really lovely this year, offering up excellent depth and intensity of flavor with the classic filigreed lightness of step of Kabinett. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of apple, a touch of passion fruit, citrus blossoms, a complex base of minerality and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and beautifully defined by its minerality, with excellent acids and grip, fine focus and balance and a long, complex and dancing finish. This is excellent. 2020-2050+. **91+.**

2019 Oberhäuser Leistenberg Riesling Kabinett AP #1- Weingut Dönnhoff

As I mentioned last year, the Leistenberg vineyard has the oldest vines of all the Dönnhoff parcels and these old vines seem to really be handling the new realities of global warming beautifully. The 2019 Kabinett comes in at nine percent alcohol and delivers a superb aromatic constellation of apple, white cherry, a bit of wild yeasts, spring flowers, bee pollen and a lovely base of slate. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and filigreed, with lovely intensity and bounce, zesty acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. As always, this is a first class example of Kabinett. 2020-2050+. **93.**

2019 Niederhäuser Klamm Riesling Kabinett AP #2- Weingut Dönnhoff

The Klamm vineyard in Niederhausen has a fine foundation of volcanic soils, which adds a nice variation to the traditional Kabinett lineup at Weingut Dönnhoff. The bouquet of the 2019 Klamm Kabinett is pure and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of pink grapefruit, breadfruit, wild yeasts, a complex base of minerality, citrus peel and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is complex, medium-full and superbly filigreed and light in its step, with fine balance and grip, excellent focus and a long, delicate and lifted finish. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2050+. **92+.**



Helmut Dönnhoff, during my last visit to the estate, reflecting on a couple of aged Kabinetten from the cellars.

2019 Norheimer Kirschheck Riesling Spätlese AP #13- Weingut Dönnhoff

The 2019 Norheimer Kirschheck Spätlese from Weingut Dönnhoff is utterly classical in profile and an outstanding wine. The bouquet is so precise and pure, jumping from the glass in a blaze of apple, pear, bee pollen, spring flowers, a lovely foundation of slate minerality and lilacs. On the palate the wine is crisp, refined and medium-full, with lovely intensity of flavor and bounce, zesty acids and outstanding focus and grip on the complex and perfectly balanced, seamless finish. A beautiful wine and *tout en finesse*. 2020-2060. **93**.

2019 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Spätlese AP #14- Weingut Dönnhoff

The 2019 Brücke Spätlese from the Dönnhoff family is a superb follow-up to their stellar 2018 version. The wine offers up an outstanding and very complex nose of apple, passion fruit, a hint of blood orange, gorgeous minerality, bee pollen, apple pie spices, orange blossoms and a nice touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, focused and racy, with superb mineral undertow, a lovely core of pristine fruit, lovely focus and balance and a long, zesty and utterly refined and vibrant finish. This is another gorgeous Spätlese, but it is a bit more reserved out of the blocks than the Kirschheck Spätlese and deserves some time in the cellar to reach cruising altitude. 2024-2060+. **94+**.

2019 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Spätlese AP #15- Weingut Dönnhoff

The Dönnhoffs' 2019 Hermannshöhle Spätlese is another absolutely stellar wine in the making. The purity and precisely-cut nature of the 2019 vintage is on display here in spades, as

the bouquet delivers a gorgeous combination of pink grapefruit, apple, iris blossoms, bee pollen, still a hint of wild yeasts, orange zest, an exotic hint of mint and a kaleidoscopic base of slate minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, refined and fullish, with gorgeous filigree and nascent complexity, a fine girdle of acidity, laser-like focus and a seamless sense of balance and grace on the very long, vibrant finish. The 2018 Hermannshöhle Spätlese was flashier out of the blocks, but my gut feeling is that the 2019 version is going to just edge it out over the long course of their respective lives in bottle. This is an understated and utterly beautiful wine. 2025-2060+. **95+.**

2019 Oberhäuser Brücke Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #16- Weingut Dönnhoff

Readers may recall that the 2018 Auslesen in the Dönnhoff cellars were non-botrytized wines, which is an extreme rarity at this estate. The 2019 Brücke Auslese is a return to the norm here, as this wine is glazed with an absolutely pristine coating of botrytis. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a celestial blend of apple, mango, honeycomb, apple pie spices galore, a fine touch of salty minerality and a potpourri of fruit blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and utterly seamless, with great focus and bounce, a lovely core of fruit, ripe, refined acids and stunning length and grip on the nascently complex and oh, so pure finish. This is stunning juice! 2029-2075. **96.**

2019 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #17- Dönnhoff

There are two Goldkapsel Auslesen from the Hermannshöhle in 2019, which are distinguishable not only by their AP numbers, but also by the use of the domaine's former label for the AP #19 version. But, first, the AP #17 Auslese from the Hermannshöhle! This version offers up a stunning bouquet of orange, apple, white cherry, lilacs, violets, bee pollen and salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, focused and seamlessly balanced, with a lovely core, excellent acidity and grip and a very long, nascently complex and svelte finish. I love the backend lift and cut of this still quite youthful wine! This is a beautiful Auslese in the making. 2029-2075. **94+.**

2019 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #19- Dönnhoff

The AP #19 Hermannshöhle Auslese, which will be the auction Auslese offered in Bad Kreuznach this year, is the more glazed version in the cellars this year, with a lovely patina of spice tones on both the nose and palate to augment the gorgeous fruit and minerality. The bouquet soars from the glass in a blaze of passion fruit, mango, pineapple, apple pie spices, salty minerality, honeycomb and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and beautifully glazed, with a great core of fruit, superb focus and grip, zesty acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long, complex and electric finish. This is truly stunning, particularly on the endless backend! 2029-2075. **97.**

2019 Niederhäuser Hermannshöhle Riesling Beerenauslese AP #18- Weingut Dönnhoff

The vast majority of Beerenauslese I have tasted from the Dönnhoff family over the years have hailed from the Brücke vineyard in Oberhausen, so I was quite surprised this year to see the 2019ers arrive and find a BA from the Hermannshöhle! The wine is breathtakingly beautiful on the nose, wafting from the glass in a complex constellation of pineapple, white cherry, a touch of papaya, honeycomb, a lovely touch of slate minerality, honeysuckle and orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and dancing, with a great core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, zesty acids and laser-like focus on the long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This is brilliant! 2020-2080. **98.**

Rheinpfalz 2019ers

Weingut Müller-Catoir (Haardt)

I only tasted the most basic, entry level bottlings from Weingut Müller-Catoir this year, but they showed very nicely and probably augur well for the more serious bottlings in the estate's collection. This is another estate that I followed for many vintages, only losing track of them after the 2002 vintage, when long-time Cellar Master, Hans Günther-Schwarz retired. The only subsequent vintage I tasted from the estate was the 2007, which was shown at Prowein in the spring of 2008 and which I enjoyed very much. There had been a slight stylistic shift here between the 2002ers and the 2007ers, as Herr Schwarz produced very reductively styled wines out of the blocks, which usually took a bit of bottle age to start to stir, and the 2007ers were more svelte right from the outset. It has been on my to do list to visit the estate on recent trips to Germany, as I am not too far from the winery when I am tasting in the Hügelland section of the Rheinhessen each year. Hopefully, after the virus recedes, I will finally have a chance to taste here at the estate. For this report, three of the four of the 2019 wines that I received from the estate were sealed under screwcaps and were a bit more pinched on the backend than some of the other 2019ers under the screw that I sampled for this report; all of them opened up nicely with fifteen minutes or so in decanter, so I would strongly recommend decanting these wines before serving them. The Muskateller "MC" Trocken and Riesling "MC" Trocken bottlings were both particularly strong for entry level wines and are great values in this vintage! The backend textural superiority of the 2019 Haardt Riesling Trocken, which is sealed with a natural cork, is so evident when tasted immediately after the "MC" Riesling Trocken under screwcap, that I really wonder why even the lower level cuvées here are bottled under screwcap. One could buy agglomerated natural corks at the same price as the screwcaps for these wines and not sacrifice the inherent textural refinement of these very strong, entry level bottlings, which to my palate are compromised a bit by their screwcaps. Of course, mentioning this at all probably seals my fate of ever getting any of the higher level bottlings as samples in the future.

2019 Muskateller "MC" Trocken AP #12 - Weingut Müller-Catoir (screwcap)

The 2019 Muskateller "MC" Trocken from Müller-Catoir comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol this year. It is produced from their younger vines of this variety, with the vines planted on a gravelly loam and ranging from thirteen to twenty years of age. The wine offers up a lovely nose of pear, a touch of mango, a nice base of soil and a lovely topnote of musky floral tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, nice soil signature, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the fairly complex finish. The closure is felt a bit on the backend today, so give it just a little time in decanter to stretch out before drinking. 2020-2030+.

2019 Scheurebe "MC" Trocken AP #5 - Weingut Müller-Catoir (screwcap)

The 2019 Scheurebe "MC" Trocken from Weingut Müller-Catoir is their entry level bottling of this grape and again, hails from younger vines, with none of these more than twenty years of age. They hail from the same vineyards around Neustadt that the Muskateller "MC" comes from, with the same loamy-gravel soil foundation. The wine in 2019 is listed at 12.5 percent octane and offers up a lovely nose of gooseberry, black currant, citrus peel, good soil tones and a topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and bone dry (the 2018 version was only 2.6 grams per liter of residual sugar, but I do not have the tech sheet for the 2019), with a respectable core, good mineral undertow, lovely acidity and a long, modestly complex finish. This is not quite as intensely flavored as the Muskateller "MC", and perhaps for

that reason, the closure seems to intrude a bit more on the finish, giving the wine a slightly pinched feel until it is decanted. It is a good solid wine, but it is a bit more “young viney” than the above. 2020-2035. **88+**.

2019 MC Riesling Trocken AP #1 - Weingut Müller-Catoir (screwcap)

The 2019 Estate Riesling Trocken from Müller-Catoir comes in at twelve percent octane this year. It offers up a deep, pure and youthful nose of sweet grapefruit, gooseberry, a beautiful base of soil tones, lemongrass and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a fine core, good mineral undertow, zesty acids and a long, closed and well-balanced finish. There is just a touch of tensile texture on the backend from the screwcap, so best if decanted for a short while prior to serving. All in all, this is a very impressive “basic” bottling of dry Riesling. 2020-2040+. **90**.

2019 Haardt Riesling Trocken AP #3 - Weingut Müller-Catoir

The 2019 Haardt Riesling Trocken AP #3 was the only sample I received from Weingut Müller-Catoir that was sealed under natural cork. Though there are some young vines in the blend here (nine years of age), there are also plenty of older vines that reach up to more than forty years-old. The soils in the vineyards in the village of Haardt are sandstone and the wine comes in at 12.5 percent octane in 2019, with 7.6 grams per liter of acidity and 5.4 grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine is young and pure on the nose, offering up scents of pink grapefruit, tart pear, lovely minerality, dried flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and fullish, with a fine core of fruit, zippy acids, excellent focus and cut and a long, mineral-driven and complex finish. This has outstanding backend lift and is really a superb bottle in the making. 2024-2055. **92**.



Rheinhessen 2019ers

Weingut Strub (Nierstein)

I had not tasted any wines from the Strub family in a long, long time, but this is another winery that I knew very well back in my formative days in the wine business, when I was first learning to enjoy the beautiful wines of Germany. I only tasted a single 2019er from the estate this year, but it was quite tasty and it was a real joy to re-familiarize myself a bit with the wines here today.

2019 Niersteiner Paterberg Riesling Spätlese AP #32- Weingut Strub (screwcap)

Walter Strub, the proprietor of Weingut Strub, was a young winemaker when I first started in the wine business and I very much have enjoyed his wines since the first vintage I sold of his, which was the 1985ers. His son, Sebastian, has been working with him for several years now and the wines remain every bit as refined as I remember, though the label has changed pretty dramatically since those days and this Spätlese was sealed under a screwcap (unthinkable back in the day). The 2019 Niersteiner Paterberg Spätlese AP #32 from Weingut Strub is a lovely wine on the nose, offering up a bright, complex and gently ethereal bouquet of white peach, apple, slate, fruit blossoms and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and very nicely balanced, with good acids and focus and a long, complex finish. This is a good, classy bottle of Niersteiner Spätlese, cut very much in the style I remember so well from thirty years ago, but I have the sense that the screwcap is already diminishing the finish a bit right now, so decant it thirty minutes before drinking. 2020-2040+. **90.**

Weingut Keller (Flörsheim-Dalsheim)

Tasting at Weingut Keller each March to preview the new vintage is usually one of the highpoints of every year for me, and to have that taken away by the global pandemic certainly stung. Usually, tasting with Klaus-Peter Keller is at least a four or five hour event, as he generously prepares samples of the vast majority of his bottlings from the new vintage and we take our time working through the lineup. This year, Klaus-Peter sent samples, but as he believes in letting the wines take their time in the cellars, only a small percentage of the 2019ers were already bottled when he needed to pack up a case for shipment to the US for this article. Consequently, a great many of his top wines from 2019 were still not bottled when the container was leaving and what follows is only a small snapshot of what I have to imagine is an absolutely magical lineup of wines from Weingut Keller from the 2019 vintage. To fill out the case, Klaus-Peter also graciously sent along a pair dry Rieslings from the 2018 vintage that were not done fermenting when I was last at the estate in March of 2019, the Riesling “RR” Reserve Trocken and the Nierstein Riesling Trocken, so that I could taste these two wines that were not part of the lineup in the spring of 2019. Their notes appear after the 2019ers in the Riesling Trocken section. Happily, as I write this, Klaus-Peter informs me that samples of the 2019 Grosses Gewächs bottlings have already departed Flörsheim, on their way to New York, so I will have the opportunity to report on them in a coming issue! Klaus-Peter reports that 2019 was a great, great vintage in the Hügelland and he is very content with everything he has crafted from this vintage, but he took a moment to point out that it was a particularly stellar vintage for the Silvaner grape in this vineyards, and he will auction off his first special bottling made from very old vine Silvaner at the auction in Bad Kreuznach in September. Given how good the 2019 Feuervogel Silvaner bottling is this year, I can only imagine that the Auction bottling of old vine Silvaner is about to set a new quality standard for this underrated variety!

Scheurebe and Silvaner

2019 Grüner Silvaner Trocken AP #2- Weingut Keller

The 2019 Grüner Silvaner Trocken from Weingut Keller comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol in this vintage, so this is a bit riper than the lovely 2018 version. This bottling is also now focusing more and more on old vines, so that they are now fully forty years of age going into this cuvée. The wine offers up a lovely, precise bouquet of sweet grapefruit, green apple, an almost crystalline base of chalky soil tones, lemongrass, a touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with racy acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, vibrant and very classy finish. This is outstanding this year! While it is approachable already (and probably, local winery customers have probably already drunk up their yearly allocation with the white asparagus crop), I would be inclined to give it a couple of years in the cellar before opening it, as this wine is coiled like a spring and will blossom beautifully with just a bit of bottle age! 2022-2040+. **90+**.

2019 Silvaner Trocken “Feuervogel” alte Reben AP #12- Weingut Keller

For the first time in the history of the estate, the 2019 Feuervogel Silvaner Trocken will not be the top bottling of this varietal from the Keller family, as Klaus-Peter has made a special bottling from another parcel of sixty year-old vines that will be offered at the auction in Bad Kreuznach. However, the Feuervogel bottling is also now made from sixty year-old vines. I cannot wait to taste the new special bottling of Silvaner, as the 2019 Feuervogel is flat out stunning this year, with the nose soaring from the glass in a blaze of tart orange, a touch of pink grapefruit, stony minerality, dried flowers, a touch of wild yeasts and a discreet topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and perfectly balanced, with a lovely core, fine mineral drive, a lovely girdle of acidity and beautiful focus on the long, complex and vibrant finish. This is gorgeous wine and it is hard to imagine that there is an even better bottling of Silvaner in the cellars this year! 2020-2050. **94**.

2019 Scheurebe Trocken AP #13- Weingut Keller

The Keller family’s 2019 Scheurebe Trocken comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol and is a stellar follow-up to the great wine made here in 2018. Echoing the theme at Weingut Keller in the last few years, these vines are now fully fifty years of age. The wine is gorgeously expressive on the nose, offering up scents of pink grapefruit, gooseberry, a beautiful foundation of minerality, orange peel, gently musky floral tones, wild yeasts and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is bright, zesty and full-bodied, with a beautiful core of fruit, vibrant acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and superbly balanced finish. This is stunning Scheurebe! 2020-2045+. **92+**.

2019 Scheurebe Kabinett AP #14- Weingut Keller

True to Klaus-Peter Keller’s observation about how good the 2019 vintage was for Kabinett, there is a Scheurebe Kabinett in the cellars here this year. The wine comes in at nine percent octane and offers up a beautiful bouquet of tangerine, gooseberry, a touch of black currant, limestone minerality, white flowers and just a whisper of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full, complex and filigreed, with lovely mineral undertow, zesty acids and superb focus and grip on the long, classy and absolutely dancing finish. This is one of the best Scheurebe Kabinetten I have ever tasted! 2020-2050. **94**.

Riesling Trocken

2019 Riesling Trocken AP #1- Weingut Keller

The 2019 Estate Riesling Trocken from Klaus-Peter Keller is 11.5 percent octane this year and is an absolutely beautiful wine again. As readers may recall from my notes on the 2018 vintage here, Klaus-Peter has decided to increase the age of vines that go into this “entry level” bottling of dry Riesling starting in the 2018 vintage and it shows in the quality of this bottling. The 2019 offers up a bright and precise bouquet of tart orange, apple, a complex base of chalky minerality, citrus peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and complex, with a superb core, lovely mineral drive and cut, ripe, snappy acids and a long, beautifully focused and balanced finish. This is an outstanding wine and will have no difficulties aging long and gracefully; I would be inclined to at least give it three or four years in the cellar and really let it open up from behind its excellent girdle of ripe acidity. 2023-2050+. **91.**

2019 Riesling “von der Fels” Trocken AP #10- Weingut Keller

The 2019 vintage of Klaus-Peter Keller’s von der Fels Riesling Trocken is truly stunning this year, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and just exuding its limestone minerality on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is precise, complex and vibrant, soaring from the glass in a mix of tart orange, pink grapefruit, kaleidoscopic chalky minerality, lemongrass, citrus peel, a touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and racy, with a superb core of fruit, outstanding mineral drive and grip, buried, racy acids and absolutely perfect balance on the long and youthfully complex finish. As more and more old vines get consigned to the von der Fels bottling (the average here is now thirty years of age, well up from what it was a decade ago), this does not have quite the same power, but it is now approaching the quality of the Grosses Gewächs bottlings from Weingut Keller in those early years when I first started visiting here in 2005 and 2006. This is a stunning value in the 2019 vintage! 2024-2055. **93.**

2018 Nierstein Riesling Trocken AP #33- Weingut Keller

The 2018 Nierstein Riesling Trocken from Klaus-Peter Keller is made from a selection of old vines in his two grand cru vineyards of Pettenthal and Hipping, with these vines planted in slightly deeper soils than the majority of the two parcels, so they are given their own cuvée. The 2018 is the first vintage of the Nierstein Trocken that I have tasted and it is stellar. The wine comes in at 12.5 percent octane and delivers a beautifully complex bouquet of pink grapefruit, blood orange, a beautiful base of slate minerality, wild yeasts, lemongrass and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and racy, with a great core of fruit, laser-like focus and grip, a lovely girdle of acidity and a very long, poised and nascently complex finish. This is a stunning young wine and not too far off the magical quality of the two Grosses Gewächs from Nierstein in this vintage! 2028-2065+. **94.**

2018 Riesling Trocken “RR” Reserve AP #11- Weingut Keller

As readers may recall, the “RR” Reserve bottling from Klaus-Peter Keller hails from a small section of the grand cru Kirchspiel vineyard that has red soils, rather than the limestone prevalent in the rest of the vineyard. Klaus-Peter chooses to bottle this wine on its own, rather than blend it in with the *terres blanches* sections of the vineyard. I used to taste this every year, but as the range of great wines has expanded a bit at Weingut Keller (and choices have to be made about what is going to be tasted), I had not tasted this particular bottling since the 2015 vintage. The 2018 RR Reserve comes in at a svelte twelve percent alcohol this year and offers up a beautiful young bouquet of tart orange, sweet grapefruit, a lovely touch of fresh pineapple, a

complex base of minerality, dried flowers, citrus peel and a touch of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with outstanding focus and grip, zesty acids and a very long, precise and complex finish. This is clearly of Grosses Gewächs quality this year and it would be fascinating to pair it up with the 2018 Kirchspiel GG a decade down the road! 2018-2080. **94+**.



2019 harvest time in the Hügelland with the family picking team at Weingut Keller.

Off-Dry and Prädikat Wines

2019 Limestone Riesling Kabinett AP #4 - Weingut Keller

The Limestone Riesling Kabinett from Weingut Keller usually comes from some of the younger vines in the Kirchspiel, Abtserde and Morstein vineyards, but with the overall move to use older and older vines in each bottling, I am not sure how young these actually are in the Kabinett in 2019. The wine comes in at 9.5 percent octane and offers up a beautiful bouquet of white peach, apple, a very complex base of limestone minerality, bee pollen, wild yeasts and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-bodied and filigreed, with lovely bounce and grip, superb mineral drive, lovely intensity of flavor and a long, poised and dancing finish. This has plenty of seamless acidity to carry it far into the future, but good luck trying to keep your hands off of bottles of this wine in its relative youth! 2020-2055. **92+**.

2019 Westhofen Kirchspiel Riesling Spätlese AP #15- Weingut Keller

The 2019 Kirchspiel Spätlese from Klaus-Peter Keller is another stunningly mineral example of the vintage, with the low yields and high dry extract easily sensed here on both the nose and palate. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of pear, nectarine, a hint of blood orange, gorgeous chalky minerality, bee pollen and a pungent topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is refined, fullish and succulent, with a lovely panoply of fruit tones, zesty acids, superb mineral drive and a long, nascently complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is also very filigreed in personality and is a real Spätlese, rather than a lighter Auslese, and will age very long and gracefully. A beautiful, beautiful wine in the making, but give it some time in the cellar to unlock its secondary layers of complexity! 2025-2065. **94.**

2019 Abtserde Riesling Auslese AP #16- Weingut Keller

Though the Abtserde vineyard is one of the greatest vineyards in the entire world for producing dry Rieslings, I am always excited to taste Prädikat wines produced here as well. The 2019 Auslese AP #16 from the Abtserde is utterly brilliant, offering up a non-botrytized bouquet of nectarine, mango, musk melon, incipient honeycomb, kaleidoscopic limestone minerality and a myriad of fruit blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, poised and almost tensile with its tight girdle of ripe acidity. The wine has an excellent core, brilliant mineral drive and grip, laser-like focus and a very, very long, very young finish. This is a magical wine in the making, but be prepared to bury it in the cellar for a minimum of ten years before starting to drink it, as this has so much to give and is going to take time to uncoil with bottle age! 2030-2090. **97.**

2019 Pius Beerenauslese AP #18- Weingut Keller

This is the first vintage where I have tasted the Pius Beerenauslese, which is a blend of botrytized bunches of Rieslaner, Scheurebe and Riesling. This is not the first vintage that Klaus-Peter has produced this bottling, but it is usually still bubbling away in fermentation when I visit the estate in March each year. The wine is stunningly beautiful on the nose, soaring from the glass in a blaze of mango, pineapple, tangerine, a bit of pink grapefruit, honey, a nice touch of soil, a bit of citrus peel and a potpourri of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, delicate and medium-full, with lovely acidity (both from the vintage and the Rieslaner in the blend), fine focus and grip and a long, complex and dancing finish. This is flat out delicious !2020-2060+. **95.**

Mosel 2018ers

Weingut Dr. Loosen (Bernkastel)

Weingut Dr. Loosen is one of the finest estates in the middle Mosel, and I do not know why I have never had the time to visit here during one of my annual spring trips. After running through a stellar lineup of their 2018ers (with a few older wines tossed in for good measure), I will certainly make a point of visiting this excellent estate on my next spring trip to the region. The estate has been in the hands of the Loosen family for more than two centuries, with current proprietor Ernst (Ernie) Loosen having taken the reins of this great property back in 1988. The estate owns 12.5 hectares of very old vines in some of the greatest vineyards of the Middle Mosel, including the Himmelreich and Domprobst in Graach, the Würzgarten in Ürzig, Sonnenuhr in Wehlen, the Treppchen and the Prälat vineyards in Erden. Ernie Loosen's father and grandfather had been gentlemen farmers here in Bernkastel, with the estate essentially a nice hobby for them, so they never really got around to replanting vines or updating winemaking facilities during their epochs at the head of the family estate. Consequently, Weingut Dr. Loosen

has some of the very oldest vines in all of Germany today, with the oldest stretching back one hundred and forty years and a large percentage more than a century old- all planted on ungrafted rootstocks. Wines are fermented with indigenous yeasts, mostly aged in old fuders and allowed extended elevage (particularly for the dry wines) prior to bottling- all good, sound and classical practices. Ernie Loosen is crafting some superb dry wines these days from several of his grand cru holdings, and he has even started a program to age a percentage of his Grosses Gewächs bottlings for a longer period in fuder prior to bottling since 2014, emulating how dry wines were made on the Mosel in the late nineteenth century, and which he has branded as GG “Réserve” wines. I had the pleasure to taste three of his 2014ers from the Réserve program, which are aged two years in fuder, rather than one, prior to bottling, and then held back in the cellars for three more years of bottle aging prior to release. I had mostly tasted Prädikat wines from Ernst Loosen previously, so I really had no idea what his dry wines would be like- what I found was some of the very finest dry Rieslings made on the Mosel and my enthusiasm for these 2018 GGs is enormous. And the handful of the 2014 GG “Réserve” bottlings, which had been given a second year of elevage in fuder prior to bottling, were truly stunning!

Dry Riesling

2019 Riesling “Dr. L” AP #9- Loosen Brothers (screwcap)

This wine is made from purchased fruit of some of the neighbors and friends of Ernst Loosen and his brother Thomas, who manages this side of the family wine business. The grapes are all from slate hillside slopes in the Mosel and the 2019er is finished off in a Spätlese level of sweetness and is nicely light on its feet with only 8.5 percent octane. It offers up a pretty nose of apple, white peach, slate and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and zesty, with a good core, bright acids and nice mineral drive on the long and bouncy finish. This is a lovely entry level bottling. 2020-2030. **88.**

2018 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Grosses Gewächs “Alte Reben” AP #48- Dr. Loosen

The 2018 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Grosses Gewächs from Weingut Dr. Loosen comes in at a very refined 12.5 percent octane in this ripe vintage. It is produced from a parcel of more than one hundred year-old vines in the Treppchen, fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in traditional, old oak, thousand liter *fuder* for one year prior to bottling. The wine has seven grams per liter of acidity and 8.4 grams per liter of residual sugar in this vintage. It offers up a really lovely bouquet of gooseberry, green apple, tart orange, a beautiful base of salty slate minerality, white flowers and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and beautifully defined by its minerality, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, balanced and complex finish. This is very good indeed! 2020-2050+. **93.**

2018 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Grosses Gewächs “Alte Reben” AP #50- Dr. Loosen

The 2018 Himmelreich Grosses Gewächs from Ernst Loosen is also 12.5 percent alcohol, which was no easy feat in this very hot summer. This is again made from very old, ungrafted vines in excess of one hundred years of age in this beautiful vineyard in Graach, with the wine having 7.8 grams of acidity and 8.7 grams per liter of residual sugar. It is handled in the cellars exactly the same as the Treppchen GG and delivers a fine, precise and complex nose of apple, pear, violets, lilacs, a lovely foundation of slate, bee pollen and a touch of lime zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a more youthful and reserved personality out of the blocks than the Treppchen GG, a lovely core of fruit, fine

mineral drive and a long, nascently complex and zesty finish. This is a bit more tensile in personality out of the blocks and will need some cellaring to start to relax structurally, but all of the constituent components are in place here for a great bottle in due course. 2026-2050+. **93**.

2018 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Grosses Gewächs “Alte Reben” AP #- Dr. Loosen

The Dr. Loosen estate has some of its very oldest vines in the Würzgarten vineyard (they are blessed with tons and tons of old vines!), as the parcel used for their GG here are fully one hundred and twenty years of age and planted on their original roots. Like all of the Dr. Loosen Grosses Gewächs bottlings, it is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged on its fine lees for one year in thousand liter *fuder*. The 2018 Würzgarten GG is twelve percent octane, has 7.2 grams per liter of acidity and 9.2 grams per liter of residual sugar. The nose of the 2018 is beautifully expressive right out of the blocks, jumping from the glass in a beautiful blend of wild strawberries, gooseberry, lime, salty slate minerality, beautiful spice tones and a topnote of iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and minerally in personality, with a lovely core, fine focus and balance, impressive complexity and a long, vibrant and very refined finish. This too will want some time alone in the cellar to really start hitting on all cylinders, but it has a fine, fine future ahead of it. 2025-2050+. **93+**.

2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Grosses Gewächs “Alte Reben” AP #- Dr. Loosen

Ernie Loosen’s Wehlener Sonnenuhr Grosses Gewächs also comes from a parcel of centenarian vines, with this bottling aged for one year in a three thousand liter *fuder*, after its fermentation with indigenous yeasts. The 2018 Sonnenuhr GG is 12.5 percent alcohol, has 6.9 grams per liter of acidity and 8.3 grams per liter of residual sugar in this vintage. The wine offers up a refined bouquet of pear, apple, vanilla bean, slate, fruit blossoms and a lovely touch of apple pie spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and cut, zesty acids and a long, focused and complex finish. This is excellent, but give it some time in the cellar to really start to unlock and drink with real generosity and breed. 2027-2050+. **93+**.

2014 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Grosses Gewächs “Réserve” AP #73- Dr. Loosen

The 2014 Würzgarten Grosses Gewächs Réserve is aging beautifully and just starting to really open up nicely in the half bottle in which I tasted it. As I mentioned above, the Réserve wines are given two years in *fuder* prior to bottling, rather than the single year for the regular releases of Grosses Gewächs. The wine is 12.5 percent octane and offers up a very refined bouquet of sweet grapefruit, gooseberry, salty slate minerality, white flowers, bee pollen and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully wide open now on the palate, with a fine core of fruit, excellent transparency and grip, zesty acids and fine focus on the long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is just a lovely drink right now, but with decades of life still ahead of it. 2020-2045+. **93**.

2014 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Grosses Gewächs “Réserve” AP #1- Dr. Loosen

The 2014 Sonnenuhr GG “Réserve” is an absolutely beautiful young wine, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of tart orange, lemon, a superb foundation of slate minerality, a touch of wild yeasts, dried flowers, gentle notes of petrol and a hint of the vineyard’s signature vanilla bean. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, complex and focused, with a superb core of fruit, lovely acidity and grip and a long, poised and perfectly balanced finish. This is simply outstanding juice. 2020-2050. **93+**.

2014 Erdener Prälät Riesling Grosses Gewächs “Réserve” AP #72- Weingut Dr. Loosen

The 2014 Erdener Prälät Riesling Grosses Gewächs “Réserve” from Weingut Dr. Loosen is outstanding, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and offering up a pure, complex and very elegant bouquet of tart orange, gooseberry, gentle smokiness, that lovely touch of Prälät raw almond, a beautiful base of slate and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and nicely broad-shouldered, with impressive mid-palate depth, fine mineral drive and grip and a long, vibrant and lifted finish that closes with a lovely note of citrus peel. The Prälät is one of the great, historical vineyards in the middle Mosel, but in this age of global warming, I sometimes come across examples that are not all that light on their feet. This is most emphatically not the case with this beautiful example of this great *terroir*! This is stellar. 2020-2045+. 94.



Classic Off-Dry Riesling

2018 Dr. Loosen Riesling Kabinett “Blue Slate” AP #7- Weingut Dr. Loosen (screwcap)

The Riesling Kabinett “Blue Slate” bottling from Ernie Loosen is composed of grapes from the villages of Graach, Wehlen and Bernkastel. The 2018 version comes in at 8.5 percent alcohol, has 8.5 grams per liter of acidity and forty grams per liter of residual sugar, giving the wine a nice, Spätlese sensibility to it, as this is a vintage where many Kabinetten are really more like classy, lighter Spätlesen by traditional standards. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, white cherry, beautiful slate undertow, spring flowers and a touch of bee pollen in the

upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and zesty, with a touch of CO₂, a good core and fine length and grip on the slightly pinched finish. This shows its closure a bit in the backend texture of the wine, but it has depth and complexity and is really quite tasty. 2020-2030. **88+**.

2018 Bernkasteler Lay Riesling Kabinett AP #10- Weingut Dr. Loosen (screwcap)

The 2018 Bernkasteler Lay Kabinett AP #10 from Weingut Loosen is from a parcel of sixty year old vines (relatively young by the estate's standards!). The wine has just over 8.7 percent alcohol, has 7.5 grams per liter of acidity and was finished at 45.8 grams per liter of residual sugar. The Lay vineyard is all blue slate, but tends to make fairly broad-shouldered wines and this is true of the lovely 2018 Lay Kabinett from Dr. Loosen. The bouquet takes a bit of coaxing to blossom, but eventually offers up scents of white peach, apple, lovely slate soil tones, white flowers and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and medium-full, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. All of the Kabinetten here are sealed under screwcap, which is unfortunate in my book, and even these 2018ers are a bit pinched right now by their closures and require a bit of extended air to stretch their wines. This is a really good wine, and it will be interesting to see how it ages under its closure. Under natural cork, it would easily last forty years! 2020-2045+? **92**.

2018 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett AP #6- Weingut Dr. Loosen (screwcap)

Ernie Loosen's 2018 Würzgarten Kabinett is also produced from sixty year-old vines, though ungrafted. The wine is just a whisper higher in octane than the Lay Kabinett in 2018, coming in at nine percent alcohol, but also a bit higher in acidity at 8.4 grams per liter. It was finished with a similar level of residual sugar at 48.8 grams per liter. The wine is really beautiful on the nose, jumping from the glass in a mix of strawberries, pear, kiwi, complex minerality (the Würzgarten is planted on a combination of red slate and volcanic sandstone), elder flowers and gentle spice tones. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and vibrant, with lovely depth of fruit, fine mineral drive, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is not quite as pinched on the backend as the Lay Kabinett when it is first poured, and it will be interesting to follow its evolution under screwcap. Again, I would have loved to have seen it under natural cork, as it could have been close to timeless under that closure. 2020-2045+? **92+**.

2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett AP #5- Weingut Dr. Loosen (screwcap)

The 2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett from Dr. Loosen also hails from sixty year-old, ungrafted vines. Like all of the Kabinetten, it is fermented and raised in a combination of stainless steel tanks and old *fuders*. The numbers on the 2018 Kabinett here are nine percent alcohol, 8.7 grams per liter of acidity and 50.3 grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine delivers a lovely, youthful nose of white cherry, apple, a touch of vanilla bean, a lovely base of blue slate and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is focused, pure and medium-full, with a lovely undertow of minerality, a good core of fruit, bright acids and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. Like its other Kabinetten brethren, this is a bit compacted today on the backend by its screwcap and needs some aeration to stretch out, but once it does, it is excellent. 2020-2045+? **92+**.

2018 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Auslese AP #66- Weingut Dr. Loosen (375 ml.)

The Auslese from the Treppchen from Ernie Loosen hails again from the centenarian, ungrafted vines that are also used for the GG. In 2018 it was made from about a fifty-fifty blend of botrytized bunches and golden berries. It comes in at eight percent octane, carries 8.6 grams

per liter of acidity and 76.5 grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine is beautiful on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, a touch of fresh pineapple, fruit blossoms, a lovely base of salty soil tones, honeycomb and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and complex, with lovely focus and grip, bright acids, a fine core and backend mineral drive and a long, refined and vibrant finish. This is lovely Auslese. 2025-2075. **93.**

2018 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese AP #62- Weingut Dr. Loosen (375 ml.)

The 2018 Würzgarten Auslese is produced from old vines, over one hundred years of age, and though the technical sheet does not state this, it seems to my palate to have been made entirely from botrytized bunches in this vintage. The wine is a bit tight when first opened, but blossoms to offer up scents of lime, tangerine, honeycomb, lovely minerality, citrus blossoms and a topnote that hints at the yellow plum to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and exotic in flavor profile, a lovely core of fruit, a fine glazing of noble rot and a long, zesty and very nicely balanced finish. This is not quite as expressive out of the blocks at the Treppchen Auslese, but with some bottle age, this will give it a run for its money. 2028-2075. **92.**

2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #65- Weingut Dr. Loosen (375 ml.)

The 2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese AP #65 from Weingut Dr. Loosen hails from seventy year-old, ungrafted vines, is nine percent octane, carries 8.6 grams per liter of acidity and ended up with 83.8 grams per liter of residual sugar. The bouquet is deep, pure and utterly refined, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, *mirabelle*, a hint of pineapple, slate, vanilla, honeycomb and a lovely topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, zesty and medium-full, with lovely filigree and grip, a fine core of pristine fruit, good mineral drive and backend lift and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is my favorite of the three, very good Auslesen that I tasted from the estate in 2018. 2025-2075. **94.**

Weingut Fritz Haag (Brauneberg)

Weingut Fritz Haag's American importer offered to send a handful of the 2018ers that they had still in stock for inclusion in this report, and as I had loved the wines at the estate back in March of 2019, I was more than happy to revisit the wines that the importer could send along. As I mentioned in my first report on the 2018 vintage back in April of 2019, Oliver Haag fashioned a great range of 2018ers, perfectly capturing all of the potential of the vintage. Fifteen months had passed since I first tasted the range of wines here in Brauneberg, and the passage of time has done absolutely nothing to calm my enthusiasm for this vintage at Weingut Fritz Haag. Re-tasting five of these 2018ers has already gotten me salivating to see what Oliver Haag has been able to craft in the brilliant 2019 vintage, but that will have to wait a bit for the wines to ship to the states, as, sadly, the ongoing coronavirus crisis in the US will prohibit my getting access to Europe anytime soon. But, while we all wait for the 2019ers from Oliver Haag, make sure to avail yourself of these magical 2018ers that still remain in the market, as this is a great, great vintage for this iconic estate in Brauneberg.

2018 Fritz Haag Riesling Trocken- Weingut Fritz Haag (screwcap) AP #2

The 2018 Estate Riesling Trocken had been bottled a few of weeks before my visit last March to the estate in Brauneberg. As I mentioned last year, the wine is twelve percent octane, has 7.5 grams of acidity and was finished with 7.9 grams of residual sugar in this vintage. Fifteen months out from my last visit, the screwcap is starting to cause a bit of reduction, so give the wine some aeration before drinking it. With air, it opens up nicely to offer up scents of lime,

green apple, salty minerality, a bit of fresh mint, smoky overtones and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full, complex and classy, with a good core, lovely slate undertow, fine focus and grip and a long, vibrant finish. As I so often say, this wine is good enough to have deserved a natural cork closure! 2020-2040. **89.**

2018 Brauneberger Riesling “Tradition”- Weingut Fritz Haag (screwcap) AP #4

As I mentioned last spring, the Riesling “Tradition” bottling falls between Kabinett and Spätlese in must weight and was around fifteen grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine was lovely as a sample just before bottling last March and is still quite lovely a fifteen months later. It offers up a fine nose of lime, gooseberry, orange peel, slate, a nice touch of Brauneberg botanicals and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and complex, with a lovely core, fine mineral drive and bounce and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. My only complaint post-bottling is that the backend textural sophistication it showed out of cask has been lost a bit with the screwcap, but that is the nature of the closure. Now, it is just a bit pinched compared to last spring, but all in all, this remains a beautifully made wine and a fine value. I know this is “just” an entry level bottling, but it is a shame it did not receive a natural cork, as absolutely nothing then would have been sacrificed to its closure. 2020-2040. **91.**

2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #7- Weingut Fritz Haag

The 2018 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Spätlese AP #7 from Oliver Haag was absolutely singing last March at the estate, so I was delighted when a bottle showed up in my range of samples this year from Loosen Brothers Imports. Fifteen months in bottle has done nothing to dissuade me that this is a magical Spätlese, with beautiful precision on both the nose and palate. The bouquet today is beautifully floral and gently savory, offering up scents of lime, pear, fresh mint, a touch of cress, a beautiful base of slate that ripples with salinity, violets, bee pollen and white lilies. On the palate the wine is bright, zesty and medium-full, with a beautiful core of fruit, lovely mineral undertow, bright acids, excellent focus and a long, very complex and filigreed finish of lovely delicacy and grace. This has not lost any of its dazzling beauty! 2020-2060. **95.**

2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #6- Weingut Fritz Haag

A year ago, when I was visiting the estate, I loved the 2018 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Auslese AP #6, and nothing has changed over the last fifteen months regarding this beautiful wine. Readers may recall that this Auslese was made entirely from ripe, golden berries, with no botrytis. Today, the bouquet remains breathtaking, offering up scents of pear, *mirabelle*, lime zest, a lovely base of slate, gentle notes of honey and a floral topnote redolent of lilacs and violets. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and light on its feet, with a glorious core of fruit, fine mineral drive, zesty acids and a long, vibrant and very complex finish. This remains a gorgeous, gorgeous wine. 2025-2075. **95+.**

2018 Brauneberger Juffer-Sonnenuhr Riesling Goldkapsel Auslese AP #9- Fritz Haag

The 2018 Juffer-Sonnenuhr Goldkapsel Auslese AP #9 was another head turner at the domaine back in March of 2019, and it too has not lost a step since then. The bouquet is pure, complex and very expressive, jumping from the glass in a mix of pear, yellow plum, fresh lime, honeycomb, gorgeous floral tones, a bit of bee pollen and honeycomb. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and bouncy, with bottomless depth, great mineral undertow and grip, zesty acids and a very, very long, lifted and energetic finish. Just a magical bottle. 2020-2085. **96.**

Maximin Grünhaus (Mertesdorf)

Maximin Grünhaus American importer, Loosen Brothers, kindly sent me a range of 2018ers from this iconic Ruwer estate, which pleased me greatly, as Dr. von Schubert had not answered any of my queries to see him last year to taste at the winery in Mertesdorf. The range selected was obviously not quite as broad as I would have tasted at the estate in the spring, but it was at least a quite representative of this iconic estate and very fine snapshot of just how beautifully the winery had done in the 2018 vintage. All of the samples I tasted from the estate in this vintage were exceptional, with the Kabinetten and Spätlesen just a touch richer than customary, but this is hardly unique to Maximin Grünhaus in the ripe and sunny vintage of 2018, and though the wines were a touch richer than some vintages, they were simply gorgeous wines of filigree, great mineral complexity and simply pristine fruit expression. The 2018 Auslesen were stellar and I very much liked Superior bottlings as well. First rate 2018ers!



2016 Riesling Sekt Brut- Maximin Grünhaus

The 2016 Riesling Sekt Brut from Maximin Grünhaus is produced entirely from grapes grown in their superb Herrenberg vineyard. The wine is fermented in old *fuder* and was aged until April of 2017, prior to bottling up for secondary fermentation. It was finished with a *dosage* of 9.3 grams per liter, done by topping off with an Abtsberg Auslese to bring the wine up to its desired point of balance. The 2016 Sekt offers up a lovely nose of lemon, a touch of bread dough, lovely, slate minerality, a bit of sea salts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the

wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with fine mineral undertow, a good core, frothy *mousse* and a long, well-balanced finish. This is very good Sekt. 2020-2030+. **89.**

2018 Pinot Blanc- Maximin Grünhaus (screwcap)

As I mentioned in my note on the 2017 Pinot Blanc from Maximin Grünhaus, the wine is now raised entirely in older *fuders* here, after a few years of raising in Burgundy-sized barrels made from oak harvested at the top of the Herrenberg. The 2018 version comes in at thirteen percent octane and offers up a ripe and stylish nose of white peach, apple, dried flowers, gentle smokiness and a lovely base of red slate minerality. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, good focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is a really high class example of Pinot Blanc these days, now that the vines are older, and it is time to bottle it under natural cork! 2020-2030+. **91.**

2018 Herrenberg Riesling Superior- Maximin Grünhäus

The 2018 Herrenberg Superior carries 15.9 grams per liter of residual sugar, has 8.1 grams per liter of acidity and comes in at 11.5 percent alcohol. The wine offers up a beautiful bouquet of lime, pear, a gorgeous array of Herrenberg botanicals, slate, wild yeasts and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, ripe and fullish, with a superb girdle of acidity, a lovely core, excellent backend mineral drive and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is an outstanding wine, and though it is not officially Trocken (as it carries a bit more residual sugar than allowed for that designation), it is most emphatically a dry wine of depth, complexity and great promise. It is approachable now, but still a very young wine and I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for at least three to five years and really let it blossom. 2023-2060. **94.**

2018 Abtsberg Riesling Superior- Maximin Grünhäus

The 2018 Superior bottling from the Abtsberg vineyard comes in a full point higher in alcohol than the Herrenberg, listed at 12.5 percent octane, with acids at 7.2 grams per liter, but its residual sugar is virtually identical at 15.8 grams per liter. The wine shows lovely ripeness, coupled to precision on the nose, which offers up ripe, scents of lime, tart orange, a superb base of slate minerality, citrus zest, cress, wild yeasts and a topnote of mint. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and focused, with a fine core of fruit, a good framing of acidity and a long, ripe and complex finish. This too is a very impressive wine, but I have a preference (at least at this early stage) in the more racy and slightly lower octane Herrenberg Superior this year, as the Abtsberg is clearly a bit riper and has yet to attain that same sense of seamless, tensile beauty as the Herrenberg exudes in spades right out of the blocks. This may come in time, but the Abtsberg Superior will need some patience. 2025-2060. **92.**

2018 Bruderberg Riesling Kabinett AP #4- Maximin Grünhaus

It is very rare to have the Bruderberg vineyard produce a Kabinett at Maximin Grünhaus, as the production from this vineyard is usually reserved for a great QbA bottling in most vintages. However, the 2018 vintage produced a Kabinett here and it is absolutely lovely. The wine offers up a beautifully refined and precise bouquet of lime, gooseberry, gentle botanicals, a fine base of soil tones and a nice touch of wild yeasts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and succulent, with a really pretty core of fruit, fine soil signature, zesty acids and lovely focus and grip on the long, wide open and vibrant finish. In style, this would have been a light Spätlese a generation ago, but in this era of global warming, it is a lovely, sweeter-styled Kabinett that still shows lovely filigree and complexity. 2020-2050+. **91.**

2018 Herrenberg Riesling Kabinett AP #3- Maximin Grünhaus

I always enjoy the examples of Herrenberg Kabinett that I have drunk in the past, and the 2018 version, AP #3 is a lovely example of its vintage. Like the Bruderberg Kabinett, this is

more a light Spätlese in style than an old-fashioned Kabinett, as it carries 73.2 grams per liter of residual sugar to go along with its 8.8 grams of acidity. The wine offers a beautifully expressive and refined bouquet of lime, pear, cress, a fine base of salty slate, a touch of wild yeasts and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and racy, with fine mineral drive and grip, a lovely core and excellent focus and balance on the long, complex and utterly refined finish. I love the structural tension of this wine, which is more tightly-knit than the Bruderberg Kabinett. 2020-2060+. **93+**.

2018 Abtsberg Riesling Kabinett AP #2- Maximin Grünhaus

The 2018 Abtsberg Kabinett AP #2 is another really lovely wine, with a bit more richness than most vintages of Kabinett from this vineyard, but fine structure for the long haul. The bouquet is more reticent out of the blocks than either the Bruderberg or Herrenberg Kabinetten, delivering scents of lime, gooseberry, a complex base of slate minerality, wild yeasts, citrus peel, a touch of lime blossoms and a topnote of cress-like botanicals. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and rock solid at the core, with a fine girdle of acidity, lovely focus and balance, excellent mineral undertow and a long, complex finish that closes with great grip. This is another outstanding wine in the making, but let it have a bit of bottle age before starting to open it with alacrity. 2025-2060+. **93**.

2018 Herrenberg Riesling Spätlese AP #5- Maximin Grünhaus

The 2018 Herrenberg Spätlese AP #5 is certainly a creature of its vintage, as this is really a lighter Auslese in personality, but with plenty of depth, complexity and raciness. The wine comes in listed at 7.5 percent alcohol, with 8.3 grams per liter of acidity and just over 101 grams per liter of residual sugar. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pineapple, white cherry, a fine base of slate minerality, honeycomb, lime zest and musky floral tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, perfectly respectable mineral undertow, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is a bit on the rich side for classic Spätlese, but the wine is flat out delicious! 2020-2060. **92**.

2018 Abtsberg Riesling Spätlese AP #6- Maximin Grünhaus

The 2018 Abtsberg Spätlese AP #6 is a touch more classically Spätlese in sensibilities, but this is because it is fermented up to eight percent and the residual sugar is a bit lower as a result, coming in at 91 grams per liter. The acids here are good, at 8.1 grams per liter and the wine offers up a youthful aromatic blend of lime, a touch of tangerine, lovely slate minerality, a bit of mintiness in the upper register, citrus blossoms and incipient honeycomb shadings. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish, complex and nicely youthful in profile, with a lovely core, good mineral drive and cut, fine focus and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is still a 2018 Spätlese, with more sweetness than one would find in most vintages, but I really like its structure and think it will age very well indeed. 2024-2060+. **92+**.

2018 Abtsberg Riesling Auslese AP #36- Maximin Grünhaus

The 2018 Abtsberg Auslese AP #36 offers up a marvelous nose that offers a range of exotic fruit tones such as guava, pineapple and hints of *mirabelle*, along with scents of slate, orange blossoms, honeycomb and a touch of the vineyard's signature botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and beautifully glazed, with a lovely core, a good mineral undertow, lovely, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is a lovely bottle of Auslese. 2027-2070. **92**.

2018 Herrenberg Riesling Auslese "Fuder Nr. 72" AP #35- Maximin Grünhaus

The 2018 Herrenberg single fuder number 72 Auslese from the von Schubert family is a lovely example of the vintage. It offers up a ripe and gently glazed nose of mango, guava, wild

yeasts, a touch of honeycomb, candied citrus peel, cress, a lovely foundation of slate and a topnote of iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, fullish and utterly refined in profile, with a lovely core, zesty acids, excellent complexity, impressive focus and grip and a very long, very pure and vibrant finish. This is stellar juice. 2020-2070. **95.**

2018 Abtsberg Riesling Auslese “Fuder Nr. 89” AP #26- Maximin Grünhaus

The Fuder number 89 Auslese from the Abtsberg is another absolutely beautiful bottle in the making, with the same lovely glaze of tropical fruit tones in its bouquet of guava, pineapple, honeycomb, orange zest, exotic floral tones, wild yeasts and a beautiful foundation of blue slate minerality. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full, focused and complex, with lovely depth at the core, a fine girdle of acidity, impeccable balance and grip and a long, zesty and focused finish. Another brilliant Auslese. 2020-2070. **95.**

Weingut Alfred Merkelbach (Ürzig)

The Merkelbach brothers’ 2018ers are really lovely wines, ripe, loaded with delicately-styled fruit tones and firmly anchored in their underlying slate minerality. This is a beautifully old-fashioned vintage for the Merkelbachs, as the pent up energy from the frosts of 2017 allowed for a nice big crop here, which allowed for plenty of quantity and a very transparent and delicate style that very much harkens back to the style of wines made on the middle Mosel during the first half of the 1980s (and which were the wines I cut my teeth on). The Merkelbach brothers, being from the old school on the Mosel, were certainly not going to turn their noses up at nature’s generosity in 2018 and perfectly content to fashion wines from bountiful yields. The entire range of the brothers’ 2018ers have good, sound acids and wide open personalities and most will drink beautifully right out of the blocks, though they will have no trouble aging gracefully for several decades. I would try to at least keep my hands off of the 2018 Auslesen from the estate until they have at least another five or six years in the cellar, just to let some of their secondary layers start to come to the fore, but they are so delicious out of the blocks that it will be no easy task to let them hibernate in the cellar for a half dozen years. As I mentioned above, the 2018 vintage was the last that the brothers have made entirely on their own, as they have finally given in (just a bit) to the passage of time and brought in Johannes Selbach and his team to help with their vines during the 2019 growing season, harvest and fermentations. With both brothers now well into their eighties, it does not seem an unreasonable thing to have just a bit of help in the vineyards and cellars! However, before the transition to extra hands on deck in the Merkelbach cellars for the 2019 harvest and vintage, there remains this lovely vintage of 2018 in their cellars in Ürzig, all hand-crafted solely by Alfred and Rolf Merkelbach, which truly transport one back to the beautiful, ethereal, filigreed wines of the middle Mosel before global warming arrived and changed the winemaking calculus across Germany. These are just a beautiful range of filigreed, refined 2018ers and most assuredly, should not be overlooked in the rush to buy 2019ers!

2018 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Kabinett AP #13- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

This was the only Kabinett I received from Weingut Merkelbach in 2018, and it is an absolute beauty. While its must weight probably would have been Auslese a generation ago, it still manages to convey lovely Kabinett sensibilities. The wine offers up a refined and delicate bouquet of apple, strawberry, slate, a hint of petrol, bee pollen and a floral topnote of lavender and roses. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a nice touch of the vintage’s youthful sweetness on the attack, lovely intensity of flavor and a long,

crisp and dancing finish. This is really quite a lovely example of Kabinett from the warm summer of 2018. 2020-2050+. **92.**

2018 Kinheimer Rosenberg Riesling Spätlese AP #2- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The 2018 AP #2 Spätlese from the Rosenberg vineyard has a beautiful touch of exotic fruit to its aromatic constellation, wafting from the glass in a very refined blend of kiwi, strawberry, lime zest, an almost salty expression of slate, apple blossoms and bee pollen. On the palate the wine is vibrant, complex, medium-full and filigreed, with a lovely dollop of fruit at the core, superb mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is such a classic example of middle Mosel Spätlese, with stunning interplay of slate minerality, pure, precise fruit and floral tones. Just lovely. 2020-2050+. **92.**

2018 Kinheimer Rosenberg Riesling Spätlese AP #3- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The 2018 Rosenberg Spätlese AP #3 from the Merkelbachs is a touch more mineral in personality and has just a bit more mid-palate stuffing than the AP #2 version, but without sacrificing any of the classic filigree of this Prädikat level. It is also the more reserved of the two bottlings in its youthful phase, offering up scents of apple, pear, a beautiful base of slate, incipient notes of bee pollen, violets and iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and quite solid at the core, with lovely mineral undertow, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This is the Rosenberg Spätlese from 2018 that is going to demand a bit of bottle age before it starts to blossom, so the AP #2 is by far the better selection for those who are predisposed to want to drink their Merkelbach Spätlese on the early side. But, this wine will age superbly. 2024-2055+. **92+.**



2018 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese AP #5- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The 2018 Spätlese AP #5 from the Würzgarten is a beautifully classical interpretation of both this great vineyard and its Prädikat level. The bouquet offers up scents of strawberries, kiwi, a touch of lime, lovely spice tones, a gorgeous base of red slate and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, bouncy and medium-full, with lovely tension and grip, a juicy core of fruit, lovely acidity and focus and a long, complex and filigreed finish. Just an utterly classical bottle of Spätlese! 2020-2055+. **93+**.

2018 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Spätlese AP #7- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The AP #7 Würzgarten Spätlese from the Merkelbachs is also utterly classical in personality, but with more spice tones on both the nose and palate and an almost crystalline expression of the vintage that is utterly captivating. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of lime, strawberries, kaleidoscopic slate minerality, bee pollen, a whisper of petrol, citrus zest and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is vibrant, medium-full and slightly broader shouldered than the AP #5 version, with a great core of fruit, marvelous mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This too is a marvelous interpretation of the Würzgarten, with perhaps a touch more depth than the AP #5, but not quite as filigreed in profile at the present time. Maybe- just maybe, this will ultimately nose out the AP #5 Spätlese with extended bottle age, but both wines are going to age beautifully and it is really hard to pick a favorite among them. They are differently style, quintessential expressions of Würzgarten Spätlese. 2023-2055+. **93+**.

2018 Kinheimer Rosenberg Riesling Auslese AP #1- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The 2018 Rosenberg Auslese AP #1 from Alfred and Rolf Merkelbach is a beautiful wine in the making. The complex nose offers up a constellation of passion fruit, a hint of the yellow plum to come, incipient notes of honeycomb, salty minerality, violets, lavender and a gentle glaze of very clean botrytis. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and nascently complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, bright acids and lovely length and grip on perfectly balanced and very promising finish. I have the impression this was made from very lightly botrytized fruit. It will want some bottle age before it really starts to blossom, but it will be a lovely bottle when it start to get rolling! 2026-2065. **93**.

2018 Kinheimer Rosenberg Riesling Auslese AP #12- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The AP #12 Rosenberg Auslese is a bit more glazed in personality than the AP #1 version, but it is really a pristine coating of botrytis and one could not ask for better! The beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, white grape, lavender, violets, bee pollen, a lovely touch of minerality and a whiff of apple blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is vibrant, fullish and complex, with zesty acids, excellent focus and grip, a superb core and a very long, filigreed and extremely classy finish. This is a beautiful wine in the making. 2026-2065. **93+**.

2018 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese AP #10- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The AP #10 Auslese from the Würzgarten from the Merkelbach brothers is a flat out gorgeous young wine. The bouquet is pure, refined and expressive, offering up scents of pear, strawberry chiffon, bee pollen, a nice touch of slate, spring flowers and lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, bouncy and complex, with superb focus and grip, lovely filigree, just a touch of botrytis and a long, complex and utterly suave, vibrant finish. This is stunning young Auslese. 2025-2065+. **94**.

2018 Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese AP #9- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The 2018 Auslese AP #9 from the Würzgarten vineyard is another *tour de force* from the Merkelbachs. It offers up a magical aromatic constellation of pear, white grape, strawberries, a lovely foundation of red slate and a potpourri of floral tones redolent of violets, lilacs and orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and gently glazed, with very clean botrytis, a lovely core, bright acids and a long, complex and still quite youthful finish. This is a touch more botrytized and powerful in personality than the AP #10 version, and it will need a bit more time to really start to express itself, but it should be outstanding in due course. 2028-2065. **93+**.

2018 Ürziger Würzgarten “Urglück” Riesling Auslese AP #11- Weingut Alfred Merkelbach

The Urglück section of the Würzgarten is the Merkelbachs’ filet section, still planted with ungrafted old vines. The 2018 Urglück Auslese from Weingut Merkelbach is an utterly refined and effortless example of the vintage. The bouquet is the epitome of elegance, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, strawberry chiffon, bee pollen, lovely minerality, lime blossoms and hints of the honeycomb to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, bright and fullish, with lovely filigree and focus, a fine core, good mineral undertow and a long, nascently complex and simply superb finish. This is not flashy, but the one more pays attention to it, the further one is drawn into its bottomless sense of beauty. 2026-2065. **94**.

Weingut Johann Joseph Prüm (Wehlen)

Unlike the other producers whose 2018ers I have written up in this article, it is quite customary for me to be tasting Katharina Prüm’s wines from this vintage at this time of the year, as she prefers to show her wines after they have all been bottled and given time to recover from the bottling prior to their being tasted and reported on in the newsletter. If my March trip this year had come to fruition, I had an appointment on my schedule to visit Katharina at the beautiful and stately family estate in Wehlen, and we would have been working through the exact same wines from the 2018 vintage that are reported upon below, so in this year where nothing seems quite normal, it is nice to know that at least with regards to the Prüm family’s beautifully refined wines, I am still on my normal schedule of tasting. Katharina Prüm has crafted an absolutely superb set of 2018ers and these are unequivocally amongst the very finest wines to be found in the vintage. In a torrid summer that had the potential to deliver rather ripe and blowsy wines, the 2018ers from Weingut Prüm are absolutely classical in profile and personality and are far more reflective of this family’s traditional style than they are a product of their particular growing season. Every single wine that I tasted from Weingut Prüm in 2018 has cut, precision and great purity and mineral drive, as one would expect from this most famous middle Mosel estate, and it is truly a great, great vintage for Katharina Prüm. My bottle of the 2018 Bernkasteler Badstube Kabinett was corked, and when I wrote to the estate’s importer here in New York about possibly getting a replacement bottle, we discovered that the wine was already completely sold out everywhere in the New York market and there was not a bottle to be had for replacement. I guess this means that there will be no need of exhortations to not overlook these gorgeous 2018ers in the market excitement caused by the first 2019ers arriving on these shores.

2018 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett AP #3- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

With almost nine hectares of vines in the beautiful Himmelreich vineyard, Weingut Prüm is one of the most important vineyard owners in this truly special *terroir*. Their 2018 Himmelreich Kabinett AP #3 is a beautifully refined wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a youthfully complex blend of apple, lemon, lovely slate minerality, lime

zest, wild yeasts and a topnote of iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-bodied and filigreed, with lovely intensity of flavor, vibrant acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, light on its feet and lifted finish. This is still a very young Kabinett and I would not venture to open another bottle until the wine is at least ten years of age. It is not that it is not very tasty already, but it is such a baby right now that it deserves the bottle age to grow and blossom. 2028-2065+. **93+**.

2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett AP #4- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett AP #4 is another beautiful wine from Katharina Prüm, but it too, is properly reserved and built for the long haul and it strikes me as inane to be wasting bottles opening them too early in their evolution. The bouquet is bright, pure and precise, offering up a youthful blend of pear, apple, vanilla bean, a fine base of grey slate, a touch of petrol and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, focused, medium-bodied and transparent, with great mineral undertow, superb focus and grip and a very long, dancing and very, very promising finish. This will start to really drink well ten years out from the vintage, but its true apogee is probably more like twenty-five years down the road! This is a beautiful young Kabinett. 2028-2065+. **94**.



2018 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #6- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

As I have mentioned in the past, the Prüm family has two small parcels in the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr vineyard, with one surrounding the sundial found mid-slope in what was the ancient

vineyard, and the other running right along the Wehlen-Zeltingen border and next to some of the family's vines in the Wehlener Sonnenuhr. The 2018 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Spätlese comes in at 8.5 percent octane this year and delivers a beautiful aromatic constellation of pear, white cherry, a lovely base of slate, bee pollen, wild yeasts, orange zest and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, fullish and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and beautifully balanced finish. This shows a bit of the muscle of the 2018 vintage, but retains classic Spätlese structural sensibilities. 2028-2075. **92.**

2018 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Spätlese AP #7- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

Katharina Prüm's Himmelreich Spätlese AP #7 is a beautiful example of the 2018 vintage. The bouquet is pure and properly youthful, offering up scents of apple, lime, a complex base of slate, wild yeasts, lilacs and a topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish, nascently complex and perfectly balanced, with a lovely core, superb mineral drive, zesty acids and a long, promising and vibrant finish. This is still reductive in the inimitable Prüm family style and will demand a full decade of bottle age before it even starts to stir, but it is going to be a brilliant wine when it is ready to drink! 2030-2080+. **94+.**

2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese AP #8- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese AP #8 is the ripest of these three Spätlesen, coming in at nine percent octane. The wine bouquet is pure, youthful and utterly classical in profile, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, a superb foundation of slate, vanilla bean, wild yeasts, bee pollen and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, fine soil signature and grip, a fine girdle of acidity and a long, precise and very, very promising finish. Great juice in the making. 2030-2080+. **94.**

2018 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #10- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

Katharina Prüm's 2018 Auslese from the Zeltinger Sonnenuhr is a beautiful young wine. It offers up superb purity and precision on the nose, which wafts from the glass in a still fairly primary mix of nectarine, white cherry, slate, bee pollen, apple blossoms and the first hint of the honeycomb to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and still fairly reductive, with lovely focus and balance, a fine core, good soil signature and a long, zesty and perfectly balanced finish. This is still a puppy and needs a solid decade's worth of bottle age to really start to express its full personality, but all of the constituent components are in place to provide and outstanding wine in due course. 2030-2080+. **93.**

2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese AP #12- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese AP #12 from Weingut Prüm is another very youthful wine that is alive with nascent beauty and enormous promise. The reticent bouquet can eventually be coaxed into offering up scents of pear, white cherry, a gorgeous base of slate, white lilies, bee pollen, wild yeasts, vanilla bean and a wisp of honeycomb. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, elegant and full-bodied, with a lovely core and mineral undertow, bright acids and impressive lightness of step on the long, complex and intensely flavored finish. This is going to be stunning! 2032-2085+. **95.**

2018 Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #14- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The 2018 Goldkapsel Auslese from the Himmelreich is another one of Katharina Prüm's top bottlings in this vintage. This has far more glaze of botrytis in evidence than wine above, offering up a beautiful young nose of peach, fresh pineapple, a hint of the sweet corn to come with bottle age, honeycomb, a nice base of minerality and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the

palate the wine is pure, fullish and filigreed, with a lovely core, good transparency and bounce, zesty acids and impressive focus and grip on the long, complex and very refined finish. This is going to be lovely, but will need some time in the cellar to allow its secondary layers to unfold. 2030-2080. **94.**

2018 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese Goldkapsel AP #15- Weingut Joh. Jos. Prüm

The AP #15 Goldkapsel Auslese from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr vineyard is another beautifully glazed wine. It is far more expressive aromatically today than the Himmelreich Goldkapsel, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a refined blend of white cherries, pear, vanilla bean, honeycomb, a lovely base of slate and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, complex, fullish and suave on the attack, with a dreamy core of fruit, lovely botrytis lift and bounce, bright acids and excellent focus and bounce on the long, pure and very, very classy finish. This is a beautiful wine in the making. 2030-2085. **95+.**

Rheingau 2018ers

Weingut Robert Weil (Kiedrich)

I do not often taste the wines from Weingut Robert Weil, and when I do cross paths with one of the estate's wines, it is usually one of their upper Prädikat bottlings. So, I was quite pleased to be able to taste a couple of the entry level wines here from 2018- both of which were very good for their level. This is another estate I hope to be able to taste a wider range of 2019ers in the months to come.

2018 Riesling Trocken AP #7- Weingut Robert Weil (screwcap)

The 2018 Riesling Trocken AP #7 from Weingut Robert Weil is produced from some of the flatter vineyards in the villages of Kiedrich and Eltville owned by the estate. The grapes are fermented and aged in older *fuders*, with the 2018er coming in at twelve percent octane and carrying 7.6 grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine is a touch reductive on the nose when first opened, but with some decanting time, blossoms to offer up scents of breadfruit, lemongrass, a lovely base of soil, gentle smokiness, a bit of lime peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is a touch less reductive than on the nose, with a fullish, focused and beautifully mineral personality. The acids here are bright and zesty, the wine is poised, balanced and complex on the long backend and is quite classy and well-made. The early touch of cooked asparagus here from the reduction is a bit troubling, as I fear it will get more pronounced with further bottle age, but for drinking over the next few years, the wine should still be in the safe zone and very enjoyable. 2020-2025+? **89.**

2018 Riesling Tradition AP #10- Weingut Robert Weil (screwcap)

The Riesling Tradition bottling from Wilhelm Weil is made from the same vineyards as the Riesling Trocken above, with the vines averaging twenty-five years of age. However, this bottling is fermented in stainless steel tanks, so that the fermentation can be stopped with a bit more residual sugar still in the wine. The 2018 Tradition comes in at 10.5 percent alcohol and ended up with 28.1 grams per liter of residual sugar. The wine is again showing some reduction on both the nose and palate (notes of asparagus and a slightly clipped, compacted finish), so some aeration when first opened is necessary. With air, the wine opens up to deliver a bouquet of lemon, white peach, salty minerality and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and complex, with Spätlese level sweetness, lovely acids and grip, fine focus and a long, complex and vibrant finish. I really like the balance of this wine, as it has just the right amount of

sweetness to balance its acidity, but the closure is playing with its backend texture already. The raw materials in both the Trocken and the Tradition are superb in 2018 and I would have loved to have seen them sealed under natural cork. But, for those willing to do a bit of preparatory work to undo the closure issues, this is really good wine for the near-term. 2020-2025+? **90.**

Rheinhessen 2018ers

Weingut Wittman (Westhofen)

Weingut Wittman in the Hügelland has been farming organically since 1990 and biodynamically since 2004. Philipp Wittman has been in charge of the family estate for many years now (taking over from his father Günter, who was the family member who made the move to organic farming here all the way back in 1990), which now comprises twenty-five hectares of vineyard holdings. These include fine holdings in some of the most famous grand crus in the Hügelland, including 5.43 hectares in the fabled Morstein vineyard (with fully three hectares in the filet section of the vineyard from which they produce their GG here), 2.27 hectares in the Kirchspiel, two hectares in the Brunnenhäuschen (the official name for the Abtserde vineyard) and two hectares in the Aulerde vineyard (a grand cru here that I have not yet tasted). In addition to the beautiful panoply of vineyard holdings in the Hügelland, the Wittman family also purchased some parcels in the Roter Hang section of Nierstein in 2014, from which they produce a beautiful bottling of Niersteiner Trocken that really excelled in the 2018 vintage. I tasted a lovely range of 2018ers from Weingut Wittman and hope to be able to expand this when the 2019ers arrive here in the US.

2018 Silvaner Trocken AP #4- Weingut Wittman (screwcap)

The Wittman family's Silvaner Trocken all hails from estate grown fruit. It is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in a fifty-fifty combination of stainless steel tanks and large *fuder*. The 2018 version comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offers up a bright bouquet of breadfruit, a touch of peach, a good base of chalky soil tones and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core of fruit, sound acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is quite a nice example of Silvaner. 2020-2028. **88.**

2018 Weisser Burgunder Trocken AP #7- Weingut Wittman

You can count me among the mystified that Philipp Wittman chooses to bottle his Pinot Blanc Trocken with a natural cork, but the Estate Riesling Trocken under a screwcap! This bottling is also fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in the same fifty-fifty blend of stainless steel and older oak *fuders* (as is the Silvaner). The 2018 Weisser Burgunder tips thirteen percent alcohol in this warm summer and delivers a fine aromatic blend of apple, white peach, a lovely touch of limestone soil, spring flowers and just a whisper of vanilla from the older *fuders*. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced, with good, but not great depth at the core, sound framing acids and quite good length and grip on the finish. 2020-2027. **88.**

2018 Estate Riesling Trocken AP #6- Weingut Wittman (screwcap)

The Estate Riesling Trocken bottling from Philipp Wittman is produced from his vineyards in Westhofen, fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised entirely in older *fuders*. The 2018 version comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol, has 7.1 grams per liter of acidity and four grams per liter of residual sugar. The nose is excellent, offering up a complex blend of pink grapefruit, white peach, a nice touch of wild yeasts, chalky minerality, a hint of smokiness and a

topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is already feeling a bit of backend pinch from its screwcap, so it needs plenty of swirling to get it to open up, but eventually offers up medium-full body, a good core, lovely soil signature and grip, good acids and a long, nascently complex finish. I like the balance here, once the screw is tamed, but I frankly was expecting a bit more breed and complexity from this bottling, given its pedigree of vineyard sources. It is not bad, but perhaps it should be just a bit better? 2020-2035+. **88.**



2018 Niersteiner Riesling Trocken AP #15- Weingut Wittman

All of the fruit for this bottling hail from vineyards in the famed *Roter Hang* section of the Rheinhessen, which runs five kilometers along the left bank of the Rhine River and comprising one hundred and eight hectares of vineyards. The Wittman family owns forty-two *ares* in the Orbel vineyard and eighty-five *ares* in the Ölberg vineyard, both within the limits of Nierstein. The 2018 is nicely ripe at thirteen percent octane, but pure and balanced at the same time, with the nose wafting from the glass in a sophisticated blend of apple, nectarine, wild yeasts, a lovely base of red slate, a touch of citrus peel and a lovely note of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, racy and complex, with an excellent core of fruit, very good backend mineral drive and cut and a long, focused and very well-balanced finish. This is first class dry Riesling! 2020-2050. **92.**

2018 Kirchspiel Riesling Grosses Gewächs AP #17- Weingut Wittman

The majority of Philipp Wittman's parcels in the Kirchspiel lie up at the top of the slope (where Klaus-Peter Keller also makes his GG from). He makes his Kirchspiel GG in twenty-five hundred liter *fuders*, aging the wine for ten months on its fine lees prior to racking and preparation for bottling. The 2018 Kirchspiel tips the scales at thirteen percent and offers up a lovely, classic nose of tart orange, white peach, wild yeasts, chalky minerality, citrus zest and a topnote of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, good undertow of chalky minerality, bright acids and a long, beautifully balanced and very promising finish. Whereas the Niersteiner Riesling Trocken is already drinking really well at this early age, this excellent example of Kirchspiel is still a puppy and deserves several years in the cellar to start to blossom and hit on all cylinders. It will be outstanding in due course. 2026-2055. **93.**

2017 Spätburgunder Trocken- Weingut Wittman

Weingut Wittman's 2017 Spätburgunder comes in at thirteen percent octane and is a very pretty example. The wine is made from a combination of old vines from German clones, along with some Dijon clones as well, and the family has recently planted some cuttings of *Pinot Fin* from Burgundy. Their Spätburgunder is fermented with indigenous yeasts, one hundred percent de-stemmed and raised all in two and three wine, two hundred and fifty liter casks for sixteen months prior to bottling. The 2017 offers up a fine nose of cherries, dark berries, chalky soil tones, woodsmoke, pretty spice tones and just a whisper of oak from the older barrels. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, tangy acids and a long, modestly tannic and nicely complex finish. This not a big wine, but it has good intensity of flavor and hits a lot of the sweet notes! I like the personality of well-done pinot noir made from German clones, and this wine is a very good example of this different twist on pinot noir. Good juice. 2020-2040. **88+.**

Rheinpfalz 2018ers

Weingut Villa Wolf (Wachenheim)

Ernie Loosen purchased the J. L. Wolf estate in Wachenheim in 1996 and relaunched the winery under the Weingut Villa Wolf name. This property is designated to produce entry level bottlings from the Pfalz and the range of 2018ers that I tasted were really very, very good for their price points.

2019 Pinot Noir Rosé AP #35- Weingut Villa Wolf (screwcap)

The 2019 Pinot Noir Rosé from Villa Wolf comes in at 11.5 percent octane and is a delicate salmon color. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a pretty blend of white cherries, strawberries, orange peel, a lovely base of minerality and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, zesty and medium-full, with a good core, lovely mineral drive, a good spine of acidity and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is delicious. 2020-2025. **89.**

2018 Pinot Gris AP #3- Weingut Villa Wolf (screwcap)

The 2018 Pinot Gris from Villa Wolf is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks, with this vintage coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol. The wine is just a touch reductive when first opened, so give it a bit of air, as it blossoms nicely to reveal scents of apple, wheat chaff, dried flowers, a lovely base of soil and just a hint of raw almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and just a touch *spritzig*, with a fine core of fruit, good soil

undertow and a long, slightly pinched finish from the screwcap. This is a lovely, 90+ point wine, but the closure is already hurting it a touch on the backend. 2020-2028. **88.**

2018 Riesling AP #13 - Weingut Villa Wolf (screwcap)

The entry level Riesling from Villa Wolf is done in an off-dry style and comes in at eleven percent octane, carrying 18.6 grams per liter of residual sugar, to go along with 6.5 grams per liter of acidity in the 2018 vintage. The wine is raised in stainless steel tanks and is also a bit reductive when first cracked, and demands a bit of aeration to start to open up. Eventually, it offers up a pretty nose of apple, pink grapefruit, white flowers, a lovely base of soil tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and succulent, with good acids and grip, lovely focus and a long, fairly complex finish. This is a perfect example of why it is risky for producers to bottle entry level wines with a screwcap, as most customers buying this wine are not going to be familiar with reductive aromas and know to decant the wine a bit before drinking it- they are just going to think it is a slightly “stinky” bottle of Riesling and not buy it again. However, once it opens up with twenty minutes in decanter, it is really quite tasty. 2020-2030. **88.**

2018 Wachenheimer Riesling “Dry” AP #8- Weingut Villa Wolf (screwcap)

The Villa Wolf Wachenheimer Riesling is all sourced from the vineyard of Königswingert in the town of Wachenheim. The vineyard is planted on a base of sandstone and loam. The technical details for this bottling give its alcohol at 11.5 percent and its residual sugar at seven grams per liter, which produces a very well-balanced dry Riesling. The wine offers up a precise bouquet of tart orange, breadfruit, a good base of salty minerality, gentle smokiness and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite dry in profile, with a good core, fine mineral drive and fine length and grip on the vibrant finish. The wine is just a touch tensile right now on the backend from its closure, but it does blossom very nicely right now with just a bit of coaxing. This is a very good bottle for its level! 2020-2030. **89+.**

RECENTLY-TASTED ITALIAN WINES SUMMER 2020



It has been quite a few years since I last wrote a general feature on Italian wines that did not focus primarily on the great traditional estates in Piemonte. I did write a fairly long article on the wines of Campania (including the tremendously underrated reds of Taurasi) more recently, but I have been overdue for another broader feature on the wines from this lovely country. As this project has been quite a while on the “to do list”, and comes on the heels of the longest issue of the newsletter I have put together in many years, I decided to primarily focus this report on red wines from Italy, and to leave the deep waters of Italian white wines for another article. However, as a few importers sent me along some very good white wines as well as a roster of reds, there are still some white wine notes included in this report. Beyond requesting primarily red wines for this report, I went a step further in my selection in not trying to taste wines from estates that I already knew and loved. It is hard not to imagine that I could have found great pleasure focusing primarily on new releases from estates such as Giacomo Conterno, Giuseppe Mascarello, Bartolo Mascarello, G. B. Burlotto, Giacosa, Marcarini and the like, but it would not really have provided any particularly useful new information, as these estates always make fine wines and are currently the gold standard for quality and consistency in Italy. So, for this report, I went in the other direction and asked importers for red wines that they were fond of and felt

would be crafted stylistically in a traditional manner that I would find merited recommending. Beyond, this, I left the selection primarily up to the importers in the hopes that there was an ocean of fine, old school-styled Italian red wines out there that I was unfamiliar with previously and that readers might like to add to their list of producers worthy of investigation. Happily, a few importers went ahead and also sent some well-known estates, so there was no shortage of blue chip wines to taste as well!

While the overall quality level was exemplary for the wines that I did receive, not everything I tasted for this article was life-altering. However, there was one new producer to me who will absolutely earn a corner of my cellar going forward for his stunning wines, and this was Michele Braganti of the Chianti estate of Monteraponi. *Signor* Braganti's wines were absolutely beautiful and unequivocally the finest examples of Chianti that I have tasted since I wrote my feature on the Monte Vertine estate ten years ago! Michele Braganti farms twelve hectares of vines here, in the tiny and timeless village of Monteraponi (from which the winery takes its name), with his vineyards tucked in on the estate amongst eight hectares of olive trees and one hundred and eighty hectares of rolling hills of clustered woodlands of ancient oak and chestnut trees that comprise the remainder of the property. The village of Monteraponi, which dates all the way back to the tenth century, lies just southwest of the better-known town of Radda, from which this sector of the Chianti region takes its name. *Signor* Braganti took over the management of the estate from his father in 2002 and then in 2003 crafted his first vintage. His father had been managing the property since 1974, but only made a small amount of wine as a hobby, being content to primarily sell off the grape production from the property. Michele Braganti farms organically and the estate's vineyards are now all officially certified as such. The vineyards lie at an altitude of between four hundred and five hundred and sixty meters above sea level, planted in an amphitheater with a soil foundation of limestone and clay topsoils, over a substrata of marl. Harvest time comes in early October here, as the village sits at one of the higher altitudes in the entire Chianti region, with the grapes at Monteraponi hand-harvested, fermented solely with indigenous yeasts in cement and aged in a combination of older oak *botti* and *tonneaux*. Michele Braganti likes to give his Chianti bottlings a traditional, long maceration prior to de-vatting for aging in wood, so that the *normale* spends twenty-five days macerating on its skins and the *Riservas* forty-five days. They are bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. However, the old school maceration times do not detract from the inherent elegance and beautiful transparency of these wines, as these are some of the most soil-defined examples of Chianti I have tasted in a long, long time, and their style takes me back to the late '70s and early '80s, when such beautifully transparent wines were the norm in this region, rather than the exception.

While many of the producers whose wines are covered below are not presently to be counted among the "blue chips" of old school Piemontese producers who are usually covered in these pages, many are certainly well-known traditionalists in their own rights and deserved far more frequent coverage in this journal than I have been able to afford them in recent times. In this regard, I was very happy to be able to taste a couple of vintages of new releases from Luigi Tecce in Taurasi, whose wines stand above his neighbors in much the same way that Bruno Giacosa's did over most of his contemporaries in Barbaresco back in the day. I was very fortunate that his US importer, Portovino, kindly sent me samples of both the newly released 2014s and the 2013 bottlings as well, so I had a chance to catch up with the current releases from the *Maestro* of Taurasi. As I have written in the past, for those who may not have the sufficient

discretionary income available to load up the cellar with the top, old school producers in Piemonte these days, whose prices often rival those of the top estates in Vosne-Romanée, building a cellar around the wines of *Signor Tecce* would not be a bad alternative by any stretch of the imagination! They are not inexpensive wines, but if the labels said “Chambertin” or “Monfortino”, rather than “Taurasi”, I think that many would find their price-tags relative bargains and would not hesitate to stock up on them!

While I set out to try and cover wines that were a bit off the beaten path in the ever-expanding universe of Italian wines, this is not to say that several new releases from well-known, blue chip estates did not also arrive on my stoop for inclusion in this article. One of the benefits of this having occurred is that I was able to get a very nice snapshot into the superb 2016 vintage in both Barolo and Barbaresco, and based on what I tasted, it is hard not to come to the conclusion that this is one of the most exciting vintages in these sectors of Piemonte since the 2001s and 1999s here. The growing season was long and sunny, but not as hot as either 2015 or 2017, which meant that producers here could harvest their Nebbiolo in the middle to third week of October, rather than the start of the month, or the last week in September, which would be the case in the torrid summer of 2017 in the region. The weather in September and October was absolutely ideal to finish up the growing season of 2016, with warm, sunny days and cooler nights, with the good diurnal temperature swings producing wines of precision, excellent mid-palate depth, elegance and plenty of personality. From the 2016s that I have tasted, it seems very clear that this is a great, great vintage and the wines are destined for long, beautiful evolution in bottle and 2016 is a year that will eventually take its rightful place in the pantheon of the greatest years in Piemonte, alongside vintages like 1964, 1971, 1978, 1982, 1989, 1996, 1999 and 2001.



Looking down at the winery of Monterapioni from one of their hillside vineyards.

I should take a moment, while lauding the superb quality of the 2016 vintage in Piemonte to again make a pitch for readers to go out and discover the beautiful Barbaresci from Cantina Rizzi, located in the township of Treiso. Cantina Rizzi has been owned and directed by the Dellapiana family now for two generations, with Enrico Dellapiana currently the winemaker of the estate. This is not an old estate by the region’s standards, as it was formed in 1973, when Enrico’s father, Ernesto Dellapiana came back to the town of Treiso to start a winery on the family land that they had owned since the late nineteenth century. His first vintage was the 1974.

Ernesto further expanded upon the family's original farm by purchasing the nearby Villa Manzola estate in 1997, giving Cantina Rizzi a very fine vineyard foundation of nearly forty hectares, with almost all of these vineyards located in the township of Treiso. With forty hectares under vine, this makes Cantina Rizzi one of the largest estates today in the entire Barbaresco DOCG. I first became acquainted with the wines from Cantina Rizzi when their American importer at the time sent me two samples of their 2001 Barbaresci, which had been made by Ernesto Dellapiana at that time. They were both very good and I have made an effort to follow the wines since that time, but they have not always been widely available here in the US, so I had not tasted the wines with any regularity since those auspicious pair of 2001 Cru Barbaresci.

Happily, the estate now has a new importer here in the states that has a very good foundation in the market and I hope that these wines, which have remained such well-kept secrets here in America may now start to get wider distribution and become better known by lovers of classically-styled, high quality Piemontese wines. Ernesto's son, Enrico Dellapiana finished up his oenological studies in time to craft the 2004 vintage here at Cantina Rizzi and has been at the winemaking helm at the estate since that fine vintage. I had the pleasure to meet Enrico in person in Düsseldorf at one of the Prowein events I attended, and I had a chance to taste his first vintage of 2004 at that time. But, from that time forward, I had not crossed paths with any subsequent vintages of Barbaresco from Cantina Rizzi and I wondered if they were still in the US market. When I started working on this feature, I did a quick Google search for the winery and was very happy to find that they had a new American importer with The Sorting Table (who represents Domaine Dujac and Domaine Bernard Moreau et Fils amongst other producers, so merchants and restaurateurs are always happy to talk with their salespeople) and I hope that the Dellapianas' superb wines will now be able to find a wider audience here in the states. Presently, Enrico Dellapiana is producing four different Cru bottlings of Barbaresco: Nervo, Rizzi, Pajoré, and a Riserva bottling called Vigna Boito which is made from a filet section of the larger Cru of Rizzi. All are located in the township of Treiso, which is the coolest of the villages that comprise the DOCG of Barbaresco. The estate owns the entirety of the fourteen hectare cru of Rizzi (from which they take their name), and has recently succeeded in purchasing some new vineyard parcels across the border in the neighboring township of Barbaresco, so we may see further Cru bottlings from the Dellapianas down the road. Cantina Rizzi also produces lovely, traditionally styled Dolcetto, Barbera, Nebbiolo d'Alba bottlings, as well as an excellent Moscato d'Asti, so one does not have to focus solely on their Barbaresci to enjoy Enrico's fine winemaking skills. This is an up and coming estate in Barbaresco and currently one of my absolute favorites in the region.

As I noted above, I loved the style and quality of the 2016 vintage in Barolo and Barbaresco. Though I did not taste all that wide an array of 2016s from further afield in Piemonte, I did see a handful of 2016s from the Alto Piemonte and it seems quite clear that this vintage is equally special a bit further up the Alps for the nebbiolo grape. The best wines from these appellations are going to age long and gracefully as well and will be well worth adding to the cellar in quantity, as forty or fifty years of potential longevity in bottle are easily within reach in 2016 for top estates here. As long as we are on the topic of Alpine wines, I should also mention how much I enjoyed the red wines I tasted for this report from the Alto Adige region, as it seems very clear to me that global warming has not had any deleterious effect on the red wines from these high altitude vineyards. I have always enjoyed the examples of the Lagrein grape in

particular from this region, which has traditionally been a medium to medium-full bodied red wine with plenty of black fruity complexity and fine intensity of flavor. However, the most recent vintages from warmer summers like 2018 have shown more body, depth and potential for cellaring than I recall these wines ever showing previously, without losing any of their inherent elegance and svelte, lightness of step. Lagrein is hardly the trendiest of varietals in Italy right now, but there are some stellar examples being made these days and they represent a real opportunity to salt away very ageworthy and complex wines at bargain prices!

While the 2016 vintage in Piemonte is one of the great, modern classics of the last generation, the vintages that surround it here are a bit more typical of what is becoming the “new normal” in these accelerating times of climate change. The vintages of 2015, 2017 and 2018 are all decidedly more marked by their torrid growing seasons, to one degree or another, and though I do not doubt that there are lots of truly excellent wines produced in all of these vintages, the accelerating heating of the globe is certainly making itself felt in Piemonte. As far as wines I tasted for this report, the hot summers of particularly 2017 and 2018 are being most keenly felt in the styles of the “lesser” wines of Piemonte, as I have never tasted so many very ripe examples of Barbera, Dolcetto or Nebbiolo della Langhe as I did working through samples for this report. In many ways this makes sense, for if global warming is creating earlier ripening vintages and pushing up harvest dates and shrinking picking windows, any logical winegrower in the region is going to race to bring in all of his top Nebbiolo vineyards for making Barolo or Barbaresco first, before he or she turns their attention to the other grape varieties growing in their parcels of vines. I tasted quite a few borderline (or overtly) overripe examples of Barbera and Dolcetto for this article, and some very heady Nebbiolo della Langhe bottlings as well from these hot summers, which I have the sense were sacrificed to some degree to save the Barolo and Barbaresco grapes as much as possible. I am not sure that there is anything that can be done in the short-term (or in the region) to reverse this reality, but it at least merits a mention here, as there are some quite atypical bottlings out there from these DOCGs from some top estates these days.

As I did receive a handful of Italian white wine samples as well for this article, I have grouped them altogether at the start of the notes that follow, with the wines just listed alphabetically by producer. Among the white wines that I received was an excellent lineup from Borgo del Tiglio, which is a very well-known producer in Collio that I had never had the pleasure to taste before; the wines were across the board outstanding and I am so delighted that the importer strongly suggested that he send samples for me to include in this article. I also had the pleasure to taste the new release from Colle Gaio, which happens to be their 2014 Malvasia del Lazio (one has to love a white wine producer that holds back their new releases fully six years in the cellar prior to sending them out into the market!) For the red wines tasting notes that follow, I have listed them by their appellation, going generally from north to south geographically. Within each DOCG grouping, the wines are listed first by vintage and then alphabetically by producer.

Vino Bianco

2019 Moscato d’Asti- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)

The 2019 Moscato d’Asti from Cantina Rizzi is a very pretty example of this wine. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pear, casaba melon, a nice touch of minerality and a floral topnote redolent of honeysuckle. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and succulent,

with good bubbles, bright acids and lovely balance on the long and zesty finish. This is so refreshing! 2020-2022. **89.**

2018 Chardonnay- Borgo del Tiglio (Collio)

Nicola Manfredi took over his father's three hectares of vines in 1981 and became one of the visionary winemakers in Collio in the decade of the 1980s, foreseeing a level of quality in the wines that would never have even been imagined by his father's generation. His Chardonnay is made from a cool vineyard that was planted in the late 1970s on a soil base of red marl and is now forty years of age. It is barrel-fermented and aged in thirty percent new oak. The 2018 Borgo del Tiglio Chardonnay is a beautiful example of this varietal, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of apple, pear, a good foundation of soil, raw almond, wild flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and youthful, with a good core, fine transparency and grip, zesty acids and lovely focus on the long and nascently complex finish. This strikes me as a wine that will even better three or four years down the road, though it is already very enjoyable. 2020-2030. **92+.**

2018 Ronco Della Chiesa- Borgo del Tiglio (Collio)

The 2018 Ronco Della Chiesa from Nicola Manfredi is a single vineyard bottling of old vine Tocai Friulano, that was planted by his father in the 1950s. Like all of Nicola's wines, it is barrel-fermented and aged for ten months in French *barriques*, with a small percentage new wood. The 2018 version deliver impressive depth and precision in its bouquet of tart pear, green olive, lime peel, a fine base of soil tones, wild fennel and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full-bodied, with impeccable balance and grip, a lovely core, bright acids and a long, classy and vibrant finish. This has great backend lift! 2020-2030+. **93.**

2018 Studio di Bianco- Borgo del Tiglio (Collio)

Studio di Bianco is a single vineyard bottling from a parcel of vines that Nicola purchased in 1989. It is a blend of Tocai Friulano, Sauvignon and Riesling, with the blend roughly half of the first grape and one-quarter each of the other two. However, there is a twist in the wine in it is fermented in two parts, with half of the Friulano and Sauvignon picked and co-fermented on one day, and the other half of the Tocai Friulano and the Riesling picked a few days later and also co-fermented, with this portion of the blend going through malo (where the first half does not). After the malo, the two components are blended together and aged in two hundred and fifty liter French barrels for ten months. The 2018 Studio di Bianco offers up a complex bouquet of green olive, lime, cress, mint, tart pear, a fine base of soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, zesty and complex, with a fine core, lovely transparency and snap, excellent focus and a long, elegant and vibrant finish. Out of the blocks, this is more expressive on the palate than the nose, but with a bit of bottle age, I have little doubt the bouquet will catch up in exuberance and generosity. First class juice. 2020-2030+. **94.**

2018 Vermentino "Pagliatura"- Fattoria di Magliano (Maremma)

The 2018 Vermentino "Pagliatura" from Fattoria di Magliano is made from a certified organic vineyard, with the wine fermented and raised in stainless steel and given six months of additional bottle aging in the cellar prior to release. It offers up a superb and vibrant nose of lime, green olive, a fine base of salty soil tones, lemongrass and a bit of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with fine mineral drive, an excellent girdle of acidity and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is very, very good Vermentino! 2020-2028. **92.**

2018 Trebbiano- Monteraponi

Michele Braganti only makes a tiny amount of Trebbiano, as there are only a few scattered parcels of old vines here found at the base of his two vineyards where he produces his Chianti Riserva bottlings. The vines are more than fifty years of age and 2010 was the first vintage where *Signor* Braganti decided to try his hand at producing a white wine. The wine starts its fermentation in cement vats, but once it gets rolling, everything is crushed and decanted to oak barrels to finish fermentation. The wood is a fifty-fifty combination of new François Frères casks and one wine barrels. The 2018 is nicely golden in color and offers up a deep and complex bouquet of orange peel, fresh apricot, a hint of green olive, buttered almonds, a fine base of soil, a touch of rosemary and refined framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with lovely balance and grip, zesty acids and a long, gently new oaky and classy finish. I have never tasted an example of Trebbiano crafted in this style, but it works beautifully. 2020-2026. **90.**

2018 Chardonnay “Rinato”- Viberti (Langhe)

Viberti’s chardonnay vineyard is pretty mature now, as it was planted all the way back in 1989. The grapes are hand-harvested and one-third of the cuvée is raised in new French *tonneaux* for three months, with the other two thirds raised in stainless steel. Once assembled, the wine is given another year in tank prior to bottling. The 2018 Rinato Chardonnay offers up a classy bouquet of apple, a nice hint of olive, orange peel, a lovely base of soil tones and a framing of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and new oaky in personality, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. Even though these are bigger barrels, I have the sense that using the *tonneaux* for a second year would allow the oak to play more of a supporting role in the personality of this wine and it would be even better. That said, it is still nicely made and quite tasty, albeit, pretty oaky in style. 2020-2025. **89.**

2018 Falanghina- Vinosia (Luciano Ercolino) Campania

The 2018 Falanghina from Luciano Ercolino is a young wine and just a touch reductive when first opened, so give it a bit of aeration to blossom (which it does quite nicely). With a bit of encouragement, the bouquet offers up scents of tart pear, lovely volcanic soil tones, dried flowers, and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and quite solid at the core, with good acids and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This will continue to get better as it develops with bottle age over at least the next couple of years. A good, solid example of this varietal. 2020-2025. **88.**

2018 Fiano di Avellino “le Grade”- Vinosia (Luciano Ercolino) Campania

In contrast to the Falanghina, *Signor* Ercolino harvests his Fiano entirely by hand and ferments it with indigenous yeasts. The difference is readily apparent on both the nose and palate, as this wine is deeper and more complex. The 2018 Fiano offers up scents of pear, lemon, a hint of green olive, lovely volcanic soil minerality, white flowers and a nice touch of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with fine mineral drive, a good core and lovely focus and grip on the long and very well-balanced finish. Fiano di Avellino ages beautifully and this wine clearly has at least ten to twelve years of evolution in it (if not more), but it is already drinking very nicely. 2020-2035+. **91.**

2017 Collio- Borgo del Tiglio (Collio)

The Collio bottling from Nicola Manferrari was first started in 1989, following experimental blending that would eventually lead to his Studio di Bianco. So this bottling is made from a similar blend of Tocai Friulano, Sauvignon and Riesling, but taken from a wider

palette of vineyard sources than the Studio di Bianco. The 2017 Collio is a lovely wine that is just starting to develop a bit of secondary aromatic complexity in its mix of pear, olive, discreet lemon peel, beeswax, a fine base of soil, just a touch of vanillin oak and a floral topnote that is starting to get a touch of muskiness like honeysuckle to it with bottle age. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a wide open personality, a good core, fine soil signature and a long, well-balanced and zesty finish. This is drinking beautifully today. 2020-2025. **92.**



2014 Malvasia del Lazio “Colle Gaio”- Colle di Catone

The 2014 Malvasia del Lazio from Antonio Pulcini’s prized Colle Gaio vineyard, in the volcanic hills south of Rome, is outstanding. The wine offers up superb aromatic complexity in its bouquet of lemon peel, marmalade, a touch of menthol, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, a lovely girdle of acidity and a long, well-balanced and nascently complex finish. This is the youngest vintage of Antonio Pulcini’s Colle Gaio that I have ever tasted, as he routinely holds his wines back in bottle in his cellars for several years before release, and it still has plenty of room to grow and evolve with further bottle age. Fine juice. 2020-2045+. **93+.**

Vino Rosato

2019 Rosato “La Gemella”- Giovanni Viberti (Barolo) Screwcap

The 2019 Rosato “La Gemella” from Giovanni Viberti is made entirely from Nebbiolo, which is given a short period of skin contact to give the wine its very pale salmon color. The wine offers up a delicate nose of melon, cherry skin, pretty spice tones, a dollop of salty soil and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and quite deep at the core, with good acids and soil signature and a long, fairly complex finish. 2020-2023. **88.**

Vino Rossi- Trentino- Alto Adige

2018 Lagrein- Muri-Gries

It has been several vintages since I last taste an example of Lagrein from Muri-Gries, but this has always been a bottling that I have liked in the past. The 2018 version did not disappoint, with the wine showing beautiful ripeness of fruit coupled to good minerality in this vintage. The bouquet delivers a fine constellation of sweet dark berries, bonfire, espresso, a bit of tree bark, dark soil tones and a delicate touch of Chartreuse-like botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with fine focus and grip, suave tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. The 2018 comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane, which is quite ripe for this bottling, but the extra mid-palate volume and sappiness is really very attractive and the wine remains very cool in the mouth. This is dynamite Lagrein that should age effortlessly, but is already very tasty! 2020-2040. **92.**

2018 Saint Magdalener- Weingut Erbhof Unterganzer

Josephus Mayr is the tenth generation of his family to run this winery, which was purchased by his ancestors all the way back in 1629! This bottling is a blend of ninety percent Schiava and ten percent Lagrein, with the wine fermented and raised in stainless steel tank. In this cool Alpine valley, even in the torrid summer of 2018, this wine only reached thirteen percent octane and offers up a bright and very refined bouquet of dark berries, woodsmoke, coffee bean, a touch of tree bark, beautifully complex botanicals and a stony base of soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a good core of quite sappy black fruit, excellent transparency and grip, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This wine has plenty of stuffing, but is light on its feet in that high altitude style that is so food friendly and attractive! This is an outstanding wine. 2020-2035+. **92.**

2016 Moratèl- Cesconi

The Cesconi family can trace back their history as wine producers in Trentino to 1751. Today, it is four brothers: Lorenzo, Roberto, Alexander and Franco, who run the family domaine, with the help still of their father, Paul. The family has tons of old vines, some more than one hundred years old, and has farmed them organically for many years. Their Moratèl bottling is composed of a blend of sixty percent Merlot, twenty percent Lagrein, fifteen percent Teroldego and five percent Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine is aged in older casks for one year prior to bottling. The 2016 Moratèl is deep and complex on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of sweet dark berries, black cherries, cigar smoke, stony soil tones, a touch of cedar and a topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of black fruit, good mineral drive and grip, ripe tannins and a long, vibrant and promising finish. This is approachable today, but really deserves a few years in the cellar to

soften up a bit more and really blossom. Fine juice and more serious than many a Super Tuscan today. 2023-2045. **92+**.

2016 Lagrein “Pletter” Riserva- Cesconi

The Pletter bottling hails Lagrein planted in the Pressano vineyard owned by the Cesconi family, which is planted to forty year-old vines and certified organic. The wine is raised in older oak casks for twelve months prior to bottling and the 2016 is a nicely ripe wine, coming in listed at fourteen percent and offering up a deep ruby color. The bouquet offers up plenty of fruit in its constellation of sweet dark berries, cassis, balsamic overtones, a good base of soil and a lovely hint of upper register botanicals and rosemary. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and sappy, with a deep core of very ripe fruit, good focus and grip, a bit of slightly gritty tannin and a long, complex and slightly overripe finish. I do not know what the growing season of 2016 was like for Lagrein in Trentino, so perhaps this is just what Mother Nature dictated, but I would have loved to have seen this wine a bit less ripe in personality, as it lacks some of the bounce and lightness of step that I typically love about this grape variety. Not bad, but I would like to see this wine in a more classic guise, as this is a bit too ripe for my tastes. 2020-2035. **86**.

Dolcetto

2019 Dolcetto d’Alba- Schiavenza (Serralunga d’Alba)

The winery of Schiavenza was established in 1956 by the Alessandria brothers, Vittorio and Ugo. Today, the estate has passed onto their daughters, Enrica and Maura, and their husbands, Luciano Pira and Walter Anselma. The family owns more than nine hectares of vineyards in Serralunga and half a hectare in La Morra. Their Dolcetto is made from just over two hectares of vines, ranging in age from fifteen to fifty-five years of age. The 2019 offers up a deep and classic nose of cherries, gamebird, woodsmoke, peanut, a touch of road tar and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and quite serious in style, with a good core, a firm chassis of tannin, tangy acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is first class Dolcetto, but old school in style and it needs some bottle age really blossom! 2023-2035. **89+**.

2018 Dolcetto d’Alba “L”- Virna Borgogno (Barolo)

Virna Borgogno started working with her father in 1988, after finishing her oenology studies in Alba, and in 2001, she succeeded to the head of the family estate in the village of Barolo. She farms just under twelve hectares of vines, with her 2018 Dolcetto a lovely example, emphasizing more soil signature than many of the more fruit-driven examples one encounters from this varietal. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, lovely soil elements and a spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with a good core of fruit, fine transparency and grip, tangy acids and just a bit of backend tannin in evidence on the long finish. Stylistically, this is cut more along the lines one will usually find in a top Barbera, rather than the more jammy style of Dolcetto, and I like this interpretation of the grape. 2020-2027. **88**.

2018 Dolcetto d’Alba “Pian Balbo”- Poderi Colla (Barolo)

The 2018 Dolcetto from Poderi Colla is made from a vineyard planted in 1970, with the wine fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel. The 2018 version delivers a fine nose of black cherries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a bit of peanut, fresh oregano and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and tangy, with a good core of fruit, little tannin and a

long, vibrant and easy-going finish. This is a Dolcetto made for early drinkability and it will provide plenty of enjoyment over the next four to six years. 2020-2026. **88.**

2018 Dolcetto d'Alba "Vagnona"- Montaribaldi (Barbaresco)

Luciano Taliano took over the reins of the family estate from his father, Pino, in 1994. His father had founded the winery in 1968, buying parcels as opportunity presented itself until the estate grew to twenty-three and a half hectares of vines. Luciano's Dolcetto bottling hails from a parcel of forty-three year-old vines and the 2018 offers up a lovely nose of red and black cherries, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke, a hint of peanut and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, tangy and nicely old school in style, with a good core, a bit of backend tannin and a long, vibrant and crunchy finish. This is tasty Dolcetto. 2020-2028. **89.**

2018 Dolcetto d'Alba- Rizzi (Treiso)

Enrico Dellapiana is one of my absolute favorite producers in Barbaresco, and his Dolcetto d'Alba bottling (all produced from vineyards in their home township of Treiso) is lovely. The 2018 comes in at a very civilized thirteen percent octane and offers up a pure and classic bouquet of black cherries, a touch of sweet cranberry, violets, a lovely base of chalky soil tones and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and crunchy, with a lovely core of fruit, just a trace of backend tannin and a long, wide open and bouncy finish of nice complexity and grip. 2020-2028. **89.**

2017 Dolcetto d'Alba- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)

The 2017 Dolcetto d'Alba from Rizzi is a bit riper than the 2018 version, as this hot summer produced a Dolcetto at fourteen percent octane. As a result, the wine shows more sappy depth on the nose, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of sweet dark berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, a bit of roasted gamebird, a fine base of soil, a hint of road tar and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and well-balanced finish that closes with a touch of balsamic overtones. This has far more stuffing than the 2018 version, as well as a bit of tannin, and is a fine example of Dolcetto. It is quite different stylistically from the classic 2018 Dolcetto here, but both are fine examples. 2020-2035. **90.**

Barbera

2019 Barbera d'Asti "La Consolina"- Montaribaldi (Barbaresco)

The 2019 Barbera d'Asti "La Consolina" from Montaribaldi hails from a parcel of vines over fifty years of age. The 2019 version delivers a lovely and very classically-styled bouquet of red and black cherries, peanuts, bonfire, gamebird and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with an excellent core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, a bit of ripe tannin and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. I love high quality, old school Barbera and the 2019 La Consolina certainly qualifies on both counts! Fine, fine juice and an absolute bargain! 2020-2030+. **90.**

2018 Agricolaie- Crealto (Monferrato)

Crealto is a relatively new winery in Monferrato, founded by Eleonora Costa and Luigi Armanino in 2008. The couple is originally from Genoa, but loved Piedmontese wines and bought four and a half hectares of vineyards planted to Grignolino, Nebbiolo and Barbera. They now farm five hectares biodynamically, having planted a bit more since the original purchase. Their Agricolaie is produced entirely from Barbera, from their newly planted parcel on clay and

limestone. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and raised in tank for ten months, The 2018 version is pretty ripe, coming in at 14.5 percent octane and offering up a deep and expressive bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, balsamic overtones, peanuts and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and a bit heady, with a full-bodied format, a good core, modest tannins and a long, tangy and gently warm finish. There is good focus and complexity here, but it is just a touch too ripe for my palate. I would love to taste this bottling from a less hot summer! 2020-2025. **87.**



2018 Umberta- Iuli (Monferrato)

The Umberta bottling is Fabrizio Iuli's entry level Barbera, from vines first planted in 1940 by his grandfather (the most recent vines here went in the ground in 1999). The wine is fermented and aged in cement tanks. The 2018 Umberta is quite a ripe wine, coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane and offering up a deep, complex nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a fine base of soil, some balsamic overtones, violets, cement and just a whisper of peanut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and plush at the core, with suave tannins, bright acids and very good length and grip on the complex and plenty ripe finish. This carries its alcohol very well indeed and is quite light on its feet, but I assume the 2018 vintage is a bit of an outlier stylistically for this bottling, but as I have not tasted any previous offerings from Fabrizio, this is pure speculation right now. This is very well-made Barbera, albeit a bit heady in this vintage! 2020-2027. **88.**

2018 Barbera d'Alba "Serra"- Paitin (Neive)

The Barbera bottling from Paitin is primarily from the fine vineyard of Serraboella in their home village of Neive, with about thirty percent of the cuvée hailing from parcels outside of the village. All of the estate's vineyards are now being farmed biodynamically. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and spends one year in older Slavonian oak *botti* prior to bottling. It offers up a bright, red fruity nose of cherries, blood orange, lovely spice tones, bonfire, a fine base of soil, oregano and a touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, tangy and full-bodied, with a good core, modest tannins and a long, vibrant and nascently complex finish. This is quite good Barbera that is approachable out of the blocks, but like so many wines from this varietal, it will be even better if given a year or two's worth of bottle age. If you choose to drink it now, make sure to give it a bit of aeration before serving, as it blossoms nicely with air. 2020-2030. **89.**

2018 Barbera- Antonio Vallana (Maggiora)

I have been drinking the wines from the Vallana family now for decades, but this was the first time I have ever tasted their bottling of Barbera! The wine is fermented and aged in cement tanks for one year prior to bottling. The 2018 version comes in at a pretty ripe octane of 13.5 percent and offers up a classic bouquet of red and black cherries, peanuts, woodsmoke, gamebird, a lovely base of soil and just a whisper of fresh oregano in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely plush at the core, with good soil signature and grip, a touch of tannin, good, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the long, ripe and complex finish. This is very good Barbera that will have no trouble aging. 2020-2035. **90.**

2018 Barbera d'Alba "La Gemella"- Giovanni Viberti (Barolo)

The Viberti estate is now run by Giovanni's two sons, Gianluca and Claudio. Their Barbera d'Alba is done in a hybrid style, with the initial fermentation getting started in a roto-fermenter before being racked to French *barriques* for malolactic. After eight months in cask, it finishes up its *elevage* with three to four months in stainless steel. The 2018 La Gemella still has plenty of varietal character on both the nose and palate, but it is not a classic example of this varietal. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, a bit of road tar, fresh oregano, bonfire and cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and very well-balanced, with a good core, well-integrated tannins and a long, complex finish. This is very well-made in its style, but something keeps whispering in my other ear that the raw materials here are so good that they really do not need to be tarted up with new oak and malo in barrel. That said, it is really very well done in its style. 2020-2028. **89.**

2017 Barbera d'Alba "La"- Virna Borgogno (Barolo)

The 2017 Barbera d'Alba from Virna Borgogno is a fine, fine bottle, with a classic underlying structure that is just starting to blossom, so that the wine is now drinking very well indeed. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, bonfire, a nice touch of fresh herbs, good soil tones and a touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still a bit chewy, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, tangy acids and a long, complex finish. This has impressive stuffing and grip, and though it is just a touch rustic in profile, it has plenty of personality and is quite satisfying. 2020-2030. **89.**

2017 Rossore- Iuli (Monferrato)

The Rossore bottling from Fabrizio Iuli is also composed entirely of Barbera, from a vineyard that was planted between 1985 and 1990. This bottling is also fermented in cement, and given a three to four week maceration, followed by racking into large Slavonian oak *botti* for two

years' worth of *elevage*. The 2017 Rossore offers up a superb nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, peanuts, a solid foundation of minerality, a touch of Piemontese herb tones and a whisper of oak from the sojourn in *botti*. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and complex, with a good core, tangy acids, modest tannins and a long, complex and quite ripe finish. This too comes in listed at 14.5 percent and shows a touch of backend heat, but is also quite transparent, vibrant and light on its feet. Good juice, but I would score it even a bit higher if it were a touch lower in octane. 2020-2035. **89.**

2017 Barbera d'Alba "Scudetto"- Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio (Castiglione Falletto)

The 2017 Barbera d'Alba "Scudetto" from Mauro and Giuseppe Mascarello is another very ripe example of the vintage, coming in listed at a full fifteen percent octane. The wine is quite dark in color for Barbera and offers up a warm vintage nose of black cherries, balsamic overtones, roasted game, a bit of chocolate, hazelnuts and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, powerful and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins, tangy acids and a distinct note of *sur maturité* on the long finish. Clearly, the Mascarellos and their picking team tackled the Nebbiolo ahead of the Barbera during the harvest in this hot summer (which we all would have done in their shoes!), and though this Barbera is still quite complex, it is very much a product of its vintage and a bit overripe to my tastes. That said, fans of modern Châteauneuf du Pape and the like will love this wine and feel I should have given it another five points! 2020-2030. **87.**

2017 Barbera d'Alba "Dü Gir"- Montaribaldi (Barbaresco)

Luciano Taliano's Barbera bottling from the Dü Gir vineyard is made from vines that are sixty years of age. He chooses to age this wine in new *barriques* for twenty months before bottling. The 2017 vintage of Dü Gir Barbera offers up a deep and new oaky nose of black cherries, balsamic tones, dark soil, cigar smoke and lead pencil new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, rock solid at the core and oaky in personality, with firm, chewy tannins, good complexity and grip and a long finish. This is pretty well made, but I have the impression that the sojourn in new oak *barriques* has depleted some of the vivacity and charm that is inherent in this varietal. I have to say that I vastly prefer the style of the Barbera "La Consolina" from *Signor* Taliano, for its vibrancy and classical styling. Maybe this would be more interesting if raised entirely in used *barriques*? 2020-2028. **87.**

2017 Barbera d'Alba- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)

Enrico Dellapiana has some nice old parcels of Barbera that go into this bottling, as two of his three plots of Barbera were planted in were planted in 1965 and 1971. The third parcel is a bit younger, having been planted in 2008, but the blend of the three produced a fine wine in 2017. The bouquet here is bright and nicely ripe, offering up scents of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, nutskin, spit-roasted gamebird and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a very good core of fruit, a bit of chewy tannin, fine focus and grip and a long, impressively complex finish. This comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane, but carries its alcohol very well and does not show any backend heat. This is a ripe, but very good Barbera that should age quite nicely. 2020-2030+. **90.**

2010 Barbera d'Alba- Olek Bondonio (Barbaresco)

The 2010 Barbera d'Alba from Olek Bondonio was pretty tannic when first released back in 2012 or early 2013, but the wine has mellowed quite a bit with six years in the cellar, though it still remains a bit chewy. Structurally, this has behaved more like Barolo, but there remains plenty of fine fruit tones here and though it is still not ready for primetime drinking, it is moving

in the right direction and may ultimately turn out to be a very fine bottle of quite long-lived Barbera. Today, at age nine, the bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, anise, dark soil, woodsmoke, fresh oregano and a touch of Barbera nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite solid at the core, with a bit of backend tannin, good acidity and focus and a long, slowly blossoming finish. I admit that I would never have imagined that this wine would take this long to come around and that few folks would cellar a structured bottle of Barbera like this until it is ready to drink, but the wine is moving quite positively in the direction of full maturity and is already quite tasty, though still with a bit more tannin to soften up with further bottle age! Very old school Barbera and a tasty bottle! 2019-2040. **89+**.



Nebbiolo d'Alba, Piemontese Blends and Off the Beaten Path Varietals

2019 Verduno Pelaverga- Comm. G. B. Burlotto (Verduno)

G. B. Burlotto is the “gold standard” of producers for the classic grape variety of Pelaverga, and their 2019 version is outstanding. The wine is typically pale ruby in color and offers up a properly peppery bouquet of desiccated cherries, pepper, lovely botanicals a fine base of soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright, tangy and intensely flavored, with lovely focus and balance, just a bit of tannin and a long, complex finish. This is just a lovely and complex middleweight. 2020-2028. **90**.

2018 Nebbiolo della Langhe- Comm. G. B. Burlotto (Verduno)

The 2018 Nebbiolo from Burlotto (which is produced from younger vines in their various Barolo crus) is a beautifully light in color, fragrant and intensely flavored wine that really captures the beauty of this grape variety. The wine is quite ripe by the standards of this bottling, as the hot summer of 2018 brings this wine in at 14.5 percent octane, but this is not evident on the pure nose of cherries, a touch of road tar, gamebird, a lovely base of soil tones and a pungent topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and transparent, with a lovely core of fruit, a sound foundation of tannin, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the complex and gently warm finish. This really carries its alcohol remarkably well. 2020-2035. **89.**

2018 Marcaleone- Crealto (Monferrato)

The 2018 Marcaleone bottling from Crealto is from the couple's oldest parcel of vines, which are fifty year-old Grignolino vines planted on a soil of clay, limestone and gypsum. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and raised in the same tanks prior to bottling. The 2018 version delivers a very refined aromatic constellation of cherries, woodsmoke, cloves, orange peel and a complex base of soil tones that will turn autumnal in the not too distant future. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a good core, a bit of chewy tannin and a long, gently warm finish. This is pretty ripe for Grignolino, coming in at listed at fourteen percent, and there is a bit of alcohol poking out on the backend. But, this is a good wine that is a prisoner of its vintage and a pretty good example, all things considered. 2020-2025. **88.**

2018 Natalin- Iuli (Monferrato)

Fabrizio Iuli's cuvée called Natalin is composed entirely of Grignolino. The bottling takes its name from his grandfather's nickname, which is appropriate, as Grignolino happened to be his favorite wine. This is mostly fairly old vines, planted in 1970 and 1990, but there is some young vine fruit here also from the "third leaf" vines planted in 2016. The wine is fermented and raised in cement tanks. The wine is properly light in color and offers up a vibrant bouquet of cherries, blood orange, lovely minerality, bonfire, wild fennel and a lovely array of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full, transparent and tangy, with lovely transparency and grip, fine focus and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish that closes with a nice touch of cherry pit and just a bit of chewy tannin. There is that lovely interplay here between sweet fruit and a bit of backend bitterness that Italians love and which is found in several of their red wines. This is top flight Grignolino! 2020-2028. **90.**

2018 Nebbiolo della Langhe- Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio (Castiglione Falletto)

Mauro and Giuseppe Mascarello's 2018 Nebbiolo della Langhe bottling is another very ripe example of this wine, coming in listed at a hefty fifteen percent octane. However, despite the heady octane level listed, the wine is impressively pure and transparent on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, orange peel, gently autumnal soil tones, gamebird, bonfire and a gentle topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully transparent, with a sappy core of red fruit, impressive soil signature, ripe, suave tannins and a long, complex and classy finish. There is bit of backend heat here, but this may well be the first fifteen percent octane wine that I would have absolutely no difficulty drinking several glasses of with a meal. How the Mascarellos managed this I have no idea, but color me impressed! It is still a creature of its vintage, but this is lovely wine. 2020-2035. **90.**

2018 Rosso- Oltretorrente (Colli Tortonesi)

The Oltretorrente Rosso Colli Tortonesi is a blend of primarily Barbera (ninety percent) and Dolcetto (ten percent), but several of their parcels date back to 1955 plantation, and these

plots include several other grape varieties in small amounts as part of the insurance of a field blend that was popular back in this post-war era in Italy. The grapes are destemmed and fermented and raised in cement tanks. The 2018 version is ripe (like so many wines in this vintage), coming in listed at 14.5 percent and offers up a deep and complex nose of red and black cherries, dark berries, balsamic overtones, a good base of soil, woodsmoke and a fine topnote of spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit hot, with a good core and soil signature, modest tannins and a long, tangy finish. There is good aromatic and flavor complexity here, but the alcohol gets in the way a bit for my palate. 2020-2024. **87.**

2018 Nebbiolo della Langhe- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)

The Nebbiolo della Langhe from Enrico Dellapiana is made from three different parcels of Nebbiolo, with the plots planted in 1976, 2005 and 2012. The wine is given a three week maceration during fermentation and then aged for one year in cask prior to bottling. The 2018 version is pretty ripe, coming in at 14.5 percent octane and offering up a pretty nose of cherries, camphor, woodsmoke, a good base of soil, just a wisp of fresh oregano and a topnote of rose petal. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This carries its alcohol pretty well and does not show any overt heat on the backend, but it is a young and structured wine and will need a few years in the cellar to start to soften up and blossom. 2023-2035. **89.**

2017 Freisa “Toetto”- Giuseppe Mascarello e Figlio (Castiglione Falletto)

The 2017 Freisa from Mauro and Giuseppe Mascarello is reflective of the hot summer of 2017, as this wine comes in at a rather unprecedented fifteen percent octane in this vintage. However, the wine is not hot or roasted and is remarkably well-made in this torrid growing season, though the wine is broader-shouldered and more Barolo-like this year than is typical of Freisa. The color is a dark ruby and the wine offers up a deep and complex bouquet of red and black cherries, spit-roasted game, a touch of nutskin, camphor, bonfire and a good foundation of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered, with a rock solid core of fruit, firm, chewy tannins, good focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This wine shows little signs of heat in the mouth and I would never guess it was fifteen percent alcohol if it was not stated on the label! It will need a handful of years in the cellar to let the tannins soften up, but it is going to be a very good wine in due course, albeit, hardly a textbook example of Freisa. But, hey, the world is none the worse off for a Freisa-Barolo hybrid once in a while! 2025-2045. **90.**

2017 Langhe Rosso “Ternus”- Montaribaldi (Barbaresco)

The Ternus bottling from Montaribaldi is composed of a blend of one-third each Nebbiolo, Barbera and Dolcetto. The grapes are fermented separately and then aged in *botti* (still on their own) for three months, prior to blending and then spending three to four months back in tank to harmonize the cuvée. The 2017 Ternus is nicely light in color and offers up a red fruity nose of cherries, fresh herb tones, bonfire, a good base of soil and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and tangy, with a good core, lovely undertow of soil and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This is a lovely middleweight that is built to shine at the table. 2020-2025. **88.**

2017 Nebbiolo della Langhe- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)

The 2017 vintage in the Langhe is another ripe year and the Nebbiolo bottling from Enrico Dellapiana comes in listed at the same octane as the 2018, a robust 14.5 percent. The wine is a touch darker in color than its 2018 sibling and shows its alcohol a bit more than the

younger wine, offering up a complex bouquet of baked cherries, hung game, a nice base of soil, bonfire, lovely spice tones and roses in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a touch heady on the backend, with a lovely core of fruit, chewy tannins, fine soil signature and grip and a long, complex and youthful finish. I really like the personality of this wine, which is really quite Barolo-like in 2017, but one has to work around the alcohol a bit when selecting food to match it, as it seems a bit higher in octane to me than the 2018. But, with roasted meats on a winter's evening, this would work just fine. It has a similar level of tannin to the 2018, but I do not think it will age quite as long, as the balance is just a touch more precarious from the slightly riper personality. 2020-2030+. **88.**

2015 Rosso Matot- Podere Ruggeri Corsini (Monforte d'Alba)

The 2015 Rosso Matot from Podere Ruggeri Corsini is a blended wine that includes Dolcetto, Barbera and Nebbiolo. The estate is run by Loredana Addari and Niccola Argamante, who produce Barolo, Barbera and Dolcetto as well. Their Rosso Matot is their second label, which includes everything that they wish to declassify from their varietal-labeled bottlings. Though the wine is meant to be drunk young, I tucked a bottle away in my cellar a few years ago to see how it would evolve with a bit of bottle age. Today, it offers up a nicely black fruity bouquet of dark berries, bonfire, a bit of hung game, gentle tariness from the nebbiolo, fresh oregano and gently autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and drinking nicely, with a good core of fruit, still a bit of backend tannin, good grip and a long, well-balanced finish. I am not sure if my experiment worked, for the wine has mellowed structurally, but I am not sure the mix of these three grapes has really harmonized more with bottle age than how they showed earlier. However, the wine still has depth and length and is not all that hard to drink, particularly during a lockdown! 2020-2025. **88.**

Alto Piemonte

2018 Vispavola "Casina Cottignano"- Colombera & Garella

Colombera & Garella was only founded in 2010 and is a collaboration of vineyard owner Giacomo Colombera and winemaker Cristiano Garella. The Colombera owned some vineyard parcels in Bramaterra and Lessona and Cristiano Garella was an up and coming young winemaker already making a name for himself in the Alto Piemonte when this partnership was founded. Their Vispavola bottling is made entirely from the Vespolina grape and is not officially entitled to a vintage date, so "officially" this is "Lotto L.2018". The wine is beautiful aromatically, offering up a bright and impressively deep nose of cherries, a touch of cranberry, woodsmoke, licorice, a good base of soil and a nice touch of spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and complex, with lovely intensity of flavor, a bit of backend tannin and impressive focus and grip on the long and bouncy finish. This is very good juice and a fine value. 2020-2027. **89.**

2017 Rosso di Valtellina- Ar.Pe.Pe.

The 2017 Rosso di Valtellina from Ar.Pe.Pe. is composed entirely of Nebbiolo, with the vines all in excess of fifty years of age. The wine is fermented and aged in old *botti* prior to bottling and also given some extended bottle aging in the cellar before release. The 2017 offers up a beautifully expressive bouquet of Bing cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, orange peel stony minerality and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a lovely core, superb soil signature and grip, moderate tannins and a long, complex

and perfectly balanced finish. This does not have the depth or weight of first rate Barolo, but it does have the breed and complexity, and really is remarkably good wine for a Rosso di Valtellina! 2020-2040. **91.**



2016 Valtellina “Il Pettirosso”- Ar.Pe.Pe.

The Valtellina “Il Pettirosso” from Ar.Pe.Pe. is made from Nebbiolo vines that range from fifty to one hundred years of age. The wine is given a traditional, long maceration and then aged in older *botti* prior to bottling; it is given two years of bottle aging in the cellars as well prior to release. The 2016 Il Pettirosso offers up a beautifully complex bouquet of bitter cherry, bonfire, camphor, gamebird, stony soil tones, rose petals and a hint of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and transparent, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids and excellent mineral drive on the long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is still a young wine and will benefit from more bottle age, but it is so well balanced that it is already quite easy to drink. 2020-2040+. **92+.**

2016 Bramaterra “Casina Cottignano”- Colombera & Garella

The 2016 Bramaterra from Colombera & Garella is composed of a blend of eighty percent Nebbiolo and ten percent each of Croatina and Vespolina. The wine offers up a beautifully complex nose of red and black cherries, bonfire, a touch of road tar, autumnal soil tones and a topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very

nicely balanced, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, vibrant and gently chewy finish. Good juice. 2020-2030+. **89.**

2016 Lessona “Pizzaguerra”- Colombera & Garella

The 2016 Lessona “Pizzaguerra” from Giacomo Colombera and Cristiano Garella is composed of a blend of ninety-five percent Nebbiolo and five percent Vespolina. The wine delivers a superb aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, licorice, a touch of saddle leather, a superb base of soil, fresh herbs and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is fairly deep, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral drive, moderate tannins and a long, balanced and complex finish. This is excellent. 2020-2040. **91.**

2016 Boca- Antonio Vallana e Figlio

The 2016 Boca from Vallana is composed of a blend of sixty-five percent Nebbiolo (no Boca can have more than seventy percent Nebbiolo in its blend), twenty percent Vespolina and fifteen percent Uva Rara. The different varieties are fermented separately in cement, blended and then aged in large *botti* for two years prior to bottling. Boca cannot be released until it is four years of age, so some bottle aging is also mandatory before it hits the market. The 2016 Boca from Vallana offers up a fine bouquet of red and black cherries, roasted gamebird, a fine base of soil, bonfire, just a whisper of nutskin and a topnote of roses. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, deep and complex, with a fine core, lovely transparency and tangy bounce, with a bit of chewy tannins and a long, poised and very well-balanced finish. This is an excellent wine that is certainly approachable today, but has the structural chassis to also age very well indeed. 2020-2045. **91.**

2016 Spanna “Colline Novaresi”- Antonio Vallana e Figlio

The Colline Novaresi is Vallana’s “regular” bottling of Spanna, made from old vines that the family is careful to always replant with *selection massale* from the same genetic material, to retain the character of this traditional strain of Nebbiolo. The wine is fermented in cement tanks and then aged for six months in *botti* prior to bottling. The 2016 Colline Novaresi is a simply beautiful young wine, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, bonfire, spit-roasted gamebird, roses, a lovely base of soil tones and a topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with a lovely core, superb balance and focus and a long, modestly tannic, tangy and complex finish. If Barolo is the Chambertin or Richebourg of Piemonte, then Spanna could well be the Chambolle-Musigny! This is a superb wine- not a powerful wine, but loaded with intensity of flavor, complexity and beautiful soil signature. 2020-2045. **92.**

2015 Grumello “Rocca de Piro”- Ar. Pe. Pe.

The 2015 Grumello “Rocca de Piro” from Ar. Pe. Pe. is a gorgeously pure and refined wine. This vintage comes in at thirteen percent octane and offers up a precise and very classy bouquet of black cherries, woodsmoke, roasted gamebird, fresh herbs, a whisper of road tar, a complex base of soil and a topnote of rose petal. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and very refined, with a fine core of fruit, buried tannins, fine balance and grip and a long, complex and nicely ripe finish. Fine, fine juice. 2020-2040+. **92.**

2015 Sassella “Stella Retica”- Ar. Pe. Pe.

The Sassella “Stella Retica” from Ar. Pe. Pe. is made from Nebbiolo vines in excess of fifty years of age, with the oldest vines in these parcels nearing the century mark. The wine is given a four month maceration during fermentation and then racked into old oak *botti* for a year and a half of *elevage*. After bottling, the wine remains in the winery’s cellars for another two

years before release. The 2015 Stellar Retica comes in at thirteen percent octane and delivers a marvelous aromatic constellation of cherries, a touch of quince, woodsmoke, gamebird, beautiful, stony soil tones, a hint of fresh oregano and a topnote of rose petal. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, refined and beautifully transparent, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip, moderate tannins, tangy acids and lovely focus on the long and complex finish. This is a beautiful wine in the making, that is quite approachable today, but will be even better with another five years or so in the cellar. 2020-2045. **93.**

2015 Gattinara- Azienda Franchino

The 2015 Gattinara from Mauro Franchino is a beautifully fragrant and transparent wine on the nose, offering up scents of cherry, new leather, stony minerality, anise, woodsmoke and a pungent topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is surprisingly (after the very inviting nose) firm and structured, with a deep, full-bodied format, ripe, chewy tannins and fine focus and grip on the long, soil-driven and nascently complex finish. This is going to be an outstanding bottle of Gattinara in due course, but it is behaving a bit like a young Barolo out of the blocks and demanding some cellaring time before it blossoms. It will be worth the wait. 2025-2055+. **91.**

2010 Campi Raudii- Antonio Vallana e Figlio

The Campo Raudii bottling from Vallana is a Vino di Tavola and not really entitled to vintage dating, but the back label notes that this library release is from Lot 2010, so I have taken the liberty to simply state the obvious. The wine is composed of a blend of ninety-five percent Nebbiolo and five percent Vespolina, with the wine fermented in cement tanks and aged here until the following May after the vintage, when it is racked into *botti* for one year of wood aging, followed by another sojourn back in cement before bottling. The wine comes in listed at thirteen percent octane, but could be just a touch higher in this ripe vintage, as it offers up a deep and complex nose of red and black cherries, hung game, fresh oregano, bonfire, gently autumnal soil tones, a hint of botanicals and a topnote of marinated orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a fine core, very good soil signature, still some chewy tannins and a long, well-balanced and nobly rustic finish. I really like this wine, which is old fashioned in the best sense of the term and drinking very nicely at age ten, albeit, still with miles to go before it sleeps. 2020-2040+. **91.**

2009 Gattinara- Antonio Vallana e Figlio

Vallana's Gattinara is produced from old vines, fermented in cement tanks and then aged for fully two years in *botti* prior to bottling. The 2009 Gattinara is aging beautifully and is really just starting to hit its apogee at age eleven, offering up a very complex bouquet of red and black cherries, spiced meats, autumnal soil tones, a beautiful array of spices, woodsmoke and a nice touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and soil-driven, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. This has a lovely sense of "noble rusticity" that is the epitome of top flight Gattinara. 2020-2045+. **92+.**



2007 Bramaterra “Casina Cottignano”- Carlo Colombera

This wine was made by Giacomo Colombera’s father, Carlo, but it is a recent release from the winery and currently available in the market. I assume the blend is similar to the 2016 version (eighty percent Nebbiolo and ten percent each of Croatina and Vespolina). The wine is aging beautifully and now offers up a pure, complex and wide open bouquet of cherries, bonfire, roasted gamebird, just a hint of orange peel, a fine base of gently autumnal soil, pretty spices and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and focused, with a fine core of fruit, still a bit of old-fashioned tannin and a long, complex and very nicely balanced and tangy finish. This is not as elegant as the wines being made here today, but there is a noble rusticity to its personality that is very attractive, and it is certainly complex and drinking beautifully. Fine juice! 2020-2040. **90.**

1958 Spanna- Desillani

The 1958 Spanna from Desillani is a bit more vigorous today than the 1955 Vallana Spanna paired up with it at this tasting and is still cruising along nicely at the far side of its plateau of maturity and has not yet started to slide into gentle decline. The wine offers up a still superbly complex and vibrant bouquet of black cherries, roasted game, gentle tariness, a touch of new leather, autumnal soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still in its plateau of peak drinkability, with fine focus and grip, a good core and a long, meltingly tannic and tangy finish. This is lovely juice that has probably been drinking beautifully for fifty years, but still has plenty of life in it. The 1958 Desillani Spanna fully underscores just how well these top Alto Piemonte wines can age over the long, long haul! 2019-2030+. **91.**

1955 Spanna- Vallana

I have been drinking the 1955 Vallana Spanna since the early 1980s and have always enjoyed the wine. This most recent bottle was perhaps, finally, starting to slip down the far side of its plateau, but given how long it has drunk well for, it is easily forgiven for this. Even as it starts to gently ease into decline, it is still a good drink, offering up scents of red berries, coffee, oregano, a bit of new leather, forest floor and a topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and beautifully transparent, with little remaining tannin, good focus and balance and a long, complex finish. Time to drink up, but it has been a very good run for this wine! 2019-2025. **88.**

Barbaresco

2016 Barbaresco “Roncaglie”- Poderi Colla

The Barbaresco “Roncaglie” from Poderi Colla hails from a vineyard in the township of Barbaresco and is a vineyard that Beppe Colla worked with for decades when he owned Prunotto. The vineyard lies at the southern end of the village, towards Treiso, with the top of the hillside bordering Gaja’s Sori Tildin (which, along with Costa Russi, hails from the neighboring Roncagliette vineyard). The Colla family was the first to start bottling this Cru on its own. The wine is given a two to three week maceration and then aged from one to two years in large *botti* prior to bottling (depending on the style of the vintage). The 2016 Roncaglie offers up a beautifully refined bouquet of cherries, bonfire, gamebird, a complex base of soil tones, gorgeous spice tones and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a fine chassis of tannin, tangy acids, good focus and grip and a long, promising and beautifully soil-driven finish. This is first class and utterly traditional Barbaresco in the making- just add the request serving of patience to let it blossom in the cellar! 2034-2075+. **93+.**

2016 Barbaresco “Palazzina”- Montaribaldi (Barbaresco)

The cru of Palazzina is located in the village of Neive. Luciano Taliano chooses to ferment the wine traditionally, but then to age it in *barriques* for twenty months, with a significant percentage of the oak being new. The 2016 Palazzina offers up a fine, youthful bouquet of cherries, a very good base of soil (that will get autumnal with bottle age), gamebird, a bit of orange peel, a nice array of spices and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and chewy, with a good core, fine transparency and grip, firm tannins and a long, tangy and very promising finish. Despite the *elevage* in *barriques*, this is pretty classical in all other respects and is a very good bottle of Barbaresco. It needs time to absorb its oak tannins, but seems to have the stuffing to eventually do so. I really do not see what the new oak brings to the equation here, and if it were me, I would at least stop buying new casks and just start using the older ones for this wine, as it would be even better raised entirely in used barrels. 2030-2065. **91.**

2016 Barbaresco “Sori Montaribaldi”- Montaribaldi (Barbaresco)

The cru of Montaribaldi lies in the southern end of the township of Barbaresco, right on the Treiso border. Its closest cru neighbor is Roncaglie. The vineyard has excellent exposition, bending around from southeast to due south to southwest, so the greater variant in ripening here is the relative altitude of the top and bottom sectors of the vineyard. The Taliano family’s 2016 Sori Montaribaldi was aged for two years in a combination of used and new *barriques* and comes in at fourteen percent octane. It offers up a red fruity and spicy bouquet of cherries, orange peel, woodsmoke, gamebird, a wide array of spices that include cloves, turmeric and fennel seed, a

fine base of soil tones and plenty of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature and a significant bit of un-integrated oak tannins poking out on the long and chewy finish. The underlying wine here is truly excellent, but again, I find the new oak here not only distracting, but seriously threatening to never fully integrate in the wine with bottle age. If it does eventually get absorbed, this will be a very, very good bottle of Barbaresco. But again, if the Taliano family would eschew new oak for this wine and just keep using the older casks, allowing the excellent *terroir* here to take center stage, this wine could be brilliant. As is the case with the score for the Palazzina bottling, I am going to assume that the oak will eventually integrate, but keep in mind that this is on the edge of being over-oaked and it is possible that the wood tannins will end up sticking out for the entire life of the wine. But, there does seem to be enough stuffing right now to eventually carry the wood. 2030-2065+. **92.**

2016 Barbaresco “Nervo”- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)

The Dellapiana family first began bottling this Cru in 1999, with the first several vintages bottled under the name of Fondetta. The Cru of Nervo lies in the village of Treiso, on the same south-facing ridge that houses the vineyards of Rizzi to its west and Bernadot to its east. Nervo is the crown of this ridge, with elevations ranging from 250 to 370 meters above sea level, with a soil composition of white marl. It is very steep. The Dellapianas’ vines are at the top of the ridge, with altitudes of 310 to 370 meters. Enrico Dellapiana gives the wine about three weeks of maceration, racks it into five thousand liter *botti* for their first year of *elevage* and finishes the wines with another year of aging in cement tanks. The 2016 Nervo offers up a fine young nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, a bit of road tar, a fine base of soil and a lovely array of spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, complex, well-balanced and very promising finish. The Cru of Nervo is known to make wines with serious stuffing and this is clearly the case here with this excellent 2016 from Enrico Dellapiana. 2030-2080. **92.**

2016 Barbaresco “Pajoré”- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)

The steep hillside Cru of Pajoré lies at the northern end of Treiso, right near the boundary with the township of Barbaresco, and just over the border from Pajoré one finds the equally fine Crus of Montaribaldi and Roncaglie. The first vintage for this Cru at Cantina Rizzi was the 2004, which also happened to be Enrico Dellapiana’s first year in charge of the family estate’s winemaking. Most of the family’s vines here were planted between 1960 and 1965, with a small section replanted in 2008. The wine is handled similarly in the cellars to the Nervo, with one year in *botti* and eight to twelve months in cement prior to bottling. The 2016 Pajoré is aromatically outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, bonfire, red curry, a bit of spit-roasted *pigeon*, a lovely vein of minerality, just a touch of fresh oregano and incipient notes of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent in personality, with a fine core of red fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, tangy acids, ripe, buried tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. The soils here are thinner than in Nervo and this comes across in a more minerally interpretation of Barbaresco. This is an absolutely first class bottle in the making! 2028-2080. **94+.**

2016 Barbaresco “Rizzi”- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)

The Cru of Rizzi is beautifully-placed on the same ridge as Nervo, in the heart of the village of Treiso. The altitude of the vineyard runs from three hundred meters to two hundred and twenty, with the exposition running southwest to due south. The Dellapianas’ vines were

planted between 1967 and 2004, so they have a nice range of ages to work with. The soils here are a bit whiter than in Nervo and Enrico Dellapiana will often give this wine fifteen months of aging in *botti* prior to racking it over to cement tanks to finish its *elevage*. Like all of the Rizzi Cru Barbarescos, it is given three years of bottling aging in the cellars as well prior to release. The 2016 Rizzi offers up a superb bouquet of red and black cherries, a bit of roasted meats, a lovely foundation of soil, camphor, lovely spice tones, anise and a gentle topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully refined on the attack, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, firm tannins and excellent focus and grip on the complex, beautifully balanced, long and tangy finish. This will need plenty of cellaring to blossom, but all of the pieces are in place for this to be absolutely stellar when it is ready to drink! 2030-2080. 93+.



2015 Barbaresco “Nervo”- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)

The 2015 vintage of Nervo from Cantina Rizzi is very good. It comes in listed at the same 14.5 percent of the 2016, but the harvest was earlier here in 2015 and one can sense this a bit in the more red fruity personality of the wine, but without quite the superb depth of the latter vintage. The bouquet is already quite expressive, offering up scents of cherries, pomegranate, curry, a fine base of soil that seems likely to get nicely autumnal fairly briskly, gamebird and a pleasant combination of fresh oregano and gentle spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe, full-bodied and complex, with a touch of *confiture* to the fruit tones, a good core, a fine

base of soil, firm, chewy tannins and a long, focused and complex finish. This is a very good bottle of Barbaresco, but it cannot quite keep pace with the 2016 version- though it will drink sooner. 2025-2065+. **90.**

2015 Barbaresco “Pajoré”- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)

The 2015 Pajoré from Cantina Rizzi is again, beautifully transparent in personality, which is most impressive coming from the torrid summer of 2015. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of cherries, incipient notes of orange peel, gamebird, a beautiful base of soil tones, a touch of black licorice, curry and a topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and has a lovely sense of sappy fruit at the core, with good soil signature, chewy, well-integrated tannins, good acids (particularly for the vintage) and a long, focused and very well-balanced finish. This is already showing excellent complexity and will age long and gracefully. Because of the hot summer and shorter growing season of 2015, the tannins here are not quite as sophisticated in texture as in the 2016 Pajoré, but this is a very, very good Barbaresco in the making. 2025-2070. **93.**

2015 Barbaresco “Rizzi”- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)

The 2015 Barbaresco “Rizzi” from Enrico Dellapiana is an excellent example of the vintage. The bouquet is deep, impressively pure for 2015 and complex, wafting from the glass red and black cherries, roasted squab, bonfire, a touch of wood ash, complex soil tones, celery seed, camphor, fresh oregano and a lovely topnote of red curry. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, rock solid at the core and impressively pure for the vintage, with fine focus and grip, ripe, firm and chewy tannins, very good balance and a long, complex and very promising finish. This is a fine, fine bottle in the making. 2027-2065+. **92.**

2014 Barbaresco “Nervo”- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)

The 2014 growing season in Barbaresco was far easier than it was in Barolo, as it was spared hailstorms and some of the rain of the summer next door in the townships of the Barolo DOCG. And like Barolo, it benefited from the perfect *fin de saison* of September and early October in the region, so the 2014 Barbaresci are very much worthy of attention. The 2014 bottling of Nervo from Cantina Rizzi is an excellent and quite classic bottle of Barbaresco. The bouquet delivers a refined and complex aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, spit-roasted venison, a bit of anise, woodsmoke, red curry and fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full-bodied, with a good core of fruit, excellent balance and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and lovely focus on the long, complex and classic finish. This is maturing at a nice pace and is almost approachable already paired with the right dish. I would still give it a half dozen years or so in the cellar, but this is one quality Barbaresco that does not have to be buried in the cellar for a decade before it starts to hit its plateau. 2024-2055+. **92.**

2014 Barbaresco “Pajoré”- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)

The cool and wet midsummer in Piemonte can be felt a bit more here in the Pajoré than in the Nervo bottling from Enrico Dellapiana, as this wine is much more black fruity in personality than is the case in most vintages. That said, it lacks for nothing, delivering a pure and complex bouquet of black cherries, a bit of dark berry, curry, bonfire, roasted meats, beautiful spice tones, autumnal soil elements and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with good soil signature, ripe tannins, very good focus and grip and a long, complex and classy finish. This will want just a few more years in the cellar than the 2014 Nervo bottling, but will be every bit as good in due course. 2026-2055+. **92.**

2013 Barbaresco Rizzi Riserva “Boito”- Cantina Rizzi (Treiso)

Vigna Boito is one of the best sections of the Cru of Rizzi, with this two hectare parcel located up at the top of the slope, with a south by southwesterly exposition. The Dellapianas' vines were planted between 1972 and 1995, so even the youngest vines in this section are now fully twenty-five years of age. This bottling sees a slightly different *elevage* in the Rizzi cellars than the other Crus, as it spends fully two years in *botti*, followed by eight months in cement or stainless steel tanks prior to bottling. It then receives three more years of bottle aging in the cellars before release. The 2013 Boito Riserva is a beautifully refined and complex, wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of cherries, pomegranate, gamebird, red curry, gently autumnal soil tones, camphor and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, lovely mineral drive and grip, ripe tannins and a long, pure and very promising finish. This is an outstanding and utterly complete, young Barbaresco that is fully worthy of the high quality reputation of the 2013 vintage. Superb juice. 2026-2075. **94.**

Barolo

2016 Barolo- Comm. G. B. Burlotto (Verduno)

The 2016 Barolo from Fabio Alessandria is a beautiful example of the vintage, offering up great purity and aromatic complexity, coupled to a refined, deep and full-bodied format that will age long and gracefully. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a classic Verduno blend of red and black cherries, gamebird, bonfire, camphor, a complex base of soil tones, fresh oregano and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, very well-integrated tannins and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is simply a beautiful young Barolo and perhaps the finest vintage I have yet tasted of the *Normale* from Burlotto. 2028-2075. **93.**

2016 Barolo “Monvigliero”- Comm. G. B. Burlotto (Verduno)

The 2016 Monvigliero from Fabio Alessandria is simply stunning. The bouquet is deep, elegant and pristinely ripe, jumping from the glass in a blend of cherries, red plums, gamebird, camphor, chalky soil tones, just a touch of sweet stems, roses, a hint of nutskin, woodsmoke and a gentle, but complex array of fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with a sappy core of fruit, great mineral drive and grip, firm, buried and suave tannins and a long, tangy, complex and supremely elegant finish. This is so perfectly balanced that it almost hides that fact that it is built for the long haul and deserves at least a decade in the cellar before starting to broach bottles. That said, I bet plenty of bottles will be opened before their time! A brilliant Monvigliero. 2030-2080+. **95.**

2016 Barolo- Cantina Bartolo Mascarello (Barolo)

The 2016 Barolo from Maria Teresa Mascarello is a brilliant expression of this great vintage. The bouquet offers up a pure and classic constellation of cherries, camphor, gamebird, a complex base of soil tones, a hint of fresh oregano, hazelnut, curry and a pungent topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a rock solid core of potentially sappy red fruit, firm, buried and absolutely seamless tannins, tangy acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, complex and soil-driven finish. Stylistically, this reminds me very strongly of a slightly more refined version of the beautiful 1989 still resting comfortably in my cellar. This is a brilliant bottle of young Barolo! 2036-2100. **96+.**

2016 Barolo “Buon Padre”- Giovanni Viberti (Barolo)

The Viberti family’s blended bottling of Barolo takes its name from the restaurant that they have long run in the center of the town of Barolo, which is called *Al Buon Padre*. The wine is made from a blend of seven different crus, with the average age of vines over fifty years of age. The wine is fermented in roto-fermenters, given about three weeks of maceration and then aged for roughly three and a half years in a combination of French and Slavonian oak casks. The nose on the 2016 offers up a refined blend of cherries, fresh oregano, camphor, a fine base of soil tones, woodsmoke, cedar and a topnote of anise. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with good soil signature, firm, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and well-balanced finish. This is quite old school in style (despite the use of roto-fermenters) and should age quite nicely, though the French *barriques* used here are a distraction, rather than something that positively adds to the symphony of flavors and aromatics. 2030-2070. **91+**.

2015 Barolo di Barolo- Virna Borgogno (Barolo)

This bottling is composed of fruit from two different vineyards in the village of Barolo: La Preda (eighty-five percent) and Sarmassa (fifteen percent). The maceration for this wine is fairly short, running from twelve to fifteen days and then the wine is aged for two years in a combination of both Slavonian oak *botti* and new, five hundred liter French oak *demi-muids*. The 2015 Barolo di Barolo from *Signora Borgogno* offers up a fine bouquet of black cherries, licorice, a touch of road tar, a fine base of soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh oregano and a stylish framing of smoky oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and has a rock solid core, with ripe, buried tannins, good acids and grip and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. I like the hybrid style here, as this is not aggressively modern in profile, but has a nice touch of French wood that works quite well with the personality of the wine. For a torrid vintage, this 2015 Barolo is impressively precise and properly structured. 2030-2070. **91**.

2015 Barolo “Noi”- Virna Borgogno (Barolo)

The Barolo “Noi” from Virna Borgogno is another blended cuvée, with her vineyard sources for this bottling hailing from vineyard parcels in the communes of Monforte d’Alba, La Morra, Verduno and Novello. This cuvée is raised entirely in Slavonian oak *botti*, with the 2015 coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane. It delivers fine aromatic complexity in its red fruity mix of cherries, gamebird, a lovely spread of soil tones, red curry, camphor, woodsmoke, rose petals and a touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and properly structured for a young Barolo, with a good core of fruit, excellent soil signature, ripe, buried tannins and fine length and grip on the tangy and complex finish. Despite its listed octane, this is very pure and soil-driven and it will age very well indeed. It is a lovely example of a blended Barolo that harkens back to the old days in the region- albeit with a more elegant profile. 2030-2075. **91+**.

2015 Barolo “Sarmassa”- Virna Borgogno (Barolo)

The single Cru bottling of Sarmassa from Virna Borgogno is produced from a parcel of vines that were planted in 1973. The wine is handled like the Barolo di Barolo bottling, with the wine raised in a combination of Slavonian oak casks and new French *demi-muids* for two years, prior to *assemblage* in stainless steel tanks for six more months prior to bottling. The 2015 Sarmassa delivers scents of black cherry, anise, roasted meats, incipient autumnal soil tones, bonfire and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and chewy,

with an excellent core of fruit, fine transparency and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is an excellent Barolo in the making. 2032-2075+. **93.**

2015 Barolo “Cannubi”- Virna Borgogno (Barolo)

Virna Borgogno’s Cannubi hails from the Cannubi Boschis vineyard, which fans of Luciano Sandrone may know well. Her vines here were planted in 1970 and the wine is raised half in Slavonian oak *botti* and half in five hundred liter French casks. The 2015 Cannubi offers up a deep and impressively pure and complex bouquet of cherries, roasted gamebird, a lovely base of soil tones, camphor, bonfire, nutskin, licorice and a touch of French oak. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a rock solid core, excellent soil signature, ripe, firm tannins, tangy acids and a long, complex and very promising finish. This comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane in this torrid summer of 2015, but has very fine purity and soil signature and has nicely synthesized the inherent elegance of the Cannubi Boschis to the power of the 2015 vintage. This will be very, very good in due course. 2032-2075+. **93.**

2015 Barolo “Bussia” Dardi Le Rose- Poderi Colla (Barolo)

The Dardi Le Rose bottling from the Colla family is from the cru of Bussia Soprana di Monforte, and this was the very first single vineyard bottling Beppe Colla produced all the way back in 1961, when he owned and made the wines at Prunotto. It has remained a favorite *terroir* with the family ever since and their 2015 is a gorgeous bottle of young Barolo, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of cherries, gamebird, a complex base of soil tones, woodsmoke, rose petals and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and soil-driven, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent focus, ripe, firm tannins, lovely balance and a long, nascently complex and utterly classical finish. This is a stunning young Barolo in the making! 2030-2085+. **94.**

2015 Barolo “Buon Padre”- Giovanni Viberti (Barolo)

The 2015 vintage of Buon Padre from the Viberti family is far more black fruity in personality than the 2016 version. The bouquet offers up a ripe and complex nose of black cherries, hung game, a touch of road tar, autumnal soil tones, bonfire, licorice and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, powerful and chewy, with a firm core of fruit, a serious chassis of tannin, good focus and grip and a long, slightly heady finish from more ripeness than the 2016 bottling. The 2015 Buon Padre comes in listed at 14.5 percent, versus fourteen for the 2016, but my gut feeling is that the octane on the 2015 is slightly understated in this torrid summer. This is a good, solid wine in the making, but I have a significant preference for the far more classically-inclined 2016 version. 2030-2070. **88.**

2013 Barolo “Ravera” Riserva- Giovanni Viberti (Barolo)

The Ravera is a relatively new cru bottling from the Viberti family, and 2013 may well be the first Riserva produced from this vineyard. The wine is fermented in roto-fermenters, sees a two to three week maceration and then is aged for forty-six months in a combination of large, French and Slavonian oak vats, with the wood from five to ten years of age. The 2013 Ravera Riserva offers up a superb nose of red and black cherries, roasted gamebird, camphor, forest floor, a touch of nutskin, anise, fresh oregano and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent in personality, with a very good core of fruit, ripe, buried tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and quite classical finish. The 2013 vintage is not a powerful year in Barolo, but this wine has plenty of stuffing and has the balance to age long and gracefully. I quite like this. 2027-2070. **92.**

2013 Barolo “San Pietro” Riserva- Giovanni Viberti (Barolo)

The Vibertis have owned vines in the San Pietro vineyard for a long time, and their 2013 Riserva is very good. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of black cherries, woodsmoke, roasted meats, a lovely base of autumnal soil tones, fresh oregano, camphor, roses and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and has a bit depth in the mid-palate than the Ravera, with firm, ripe tannins, excellent focus and grip, excellent soil signature and a long, complex and very promising finish. I have the impression that this wine saw a bit younger oak during its *elevage* than the Ravera, as there is a bit of oak spice in evidence here on the nose, but the wine seems to have the stuffing to eventually eat up the oak influence and should age long and gracefully. 2030-2070. 92.



2010 Barolo “Cerequio”- Michele Chiarlo (Calamandrana)

Michele Chiarlo owns three choice parcels in the cru of Cerequio, a beautiful amphitheater of vines that lies on the boundary between the townships of La Morra and Barolo, in the same ridge that houses Brunate. This cru from the estate is aged in seven hundred liter *tonneaux*. The 2010 Cerequio is starting to blossom aromatically at age ten, offering up a developing and complex nose of black cherries, licorice, roasted meats, dark soil tones, camphor, bonfire and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with firm, chewy tannins, good focus and grip and a long, complex and still fairly youthful finish. While the nose is starting to stir here, the palate still has miles to go. Some of the tannins here are

oak-derived tannins, which I worry about a bit, as this wine is now ten years of age and one would think the oak would have been fully integrated by now. Still, there is plenty of stuffing at the core, so it may well carry the wood in the long run. 2030-2065+. **90.**

2010 Barolo “Cannubi”- Michele Chiarlo (Calamandrana)

Michele Chiarlo owns two parcels in the greater vineyard of Cannubi, with the much larger one in the sector simply known as Cannubi, with the smaller one in the section of Cannubi San Lorenzo. Together they comprise just under one hectare. Like the Cerequio, this wine is aged in seven hundred liter *tonneaux*, rather than *botti*. The 2010 Cannubi is deep, complex and gently new oaky on the nose, offering up scents of black cherries, bonfire, roasted game, fresh herb tones, road tar, autumnal soils and smoky oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature and a long, still fairly chewy finish. The oak tannins here seem a touch better integrated today than in the 2010 Cerequio, and this wine should evolve nicely with further bottle age. But, that said, Cannubi is considered one of the most elegant crus in all of Barolo (especially in the heart of the vineyard, where the estate has their larger parcel of vines) and I do not really understand why so much new oak is needed with a wine from such an inherently graceful *terroir*. This is not bad, but it could be great without the new wood! 2030-2065+. **91.**

2007 Barolo “Cerequio”- Michele Chiarlo (Calamandrana)

The 2007 Cerequio from Michele Chiarlo is more marked by its new oak on the nose than the 2010 version. It offers up admirable depth and complexity in its aromatic constellation of black cherries, dark berries, balsamic overtones, anise, road tar, autumnal soil tones and plenty of cedary, spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still quite chewy, with some dry-edged oak tannins still framing the wine. There is plenty of depth at the core and admirable complexity here, but I worry about the wood tannins still not being fully-integrated thirteen years out from the vintage. The oak here is a pity. 2027-2055+. **88.**

1982 Barolo “Bric del Fiasc”- Paolo Scavino (Castiglione Falletto)

This was one of the last “classical” years here at Paolo Scavino, before the new French oak really well-established in the cellars. The ’82 Bric de Fiasc shows how tasty these wines used to be before the new oak fetish got in the way, as it is still drinking very well indeed, offering up a complex and *à point* bouquet of desiccated cherries, licorice, new leather, oregano, *sous bois*, discreet tariness and a bit of onion skin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and perfectly resolved, with a good core, melted tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. Good juice at its apogee, but still with plenty of life in it. 2019-2035. **92.**

Bolgheri

2017 Orio- Podere Il Castellaccio

The 2017 Orio from Podere Il Castellaccio is comprised of a blend of sixty percent Cabernet Franc, thirty percent Merlot and ten percent Syrah. The wine is aged for twelve months in French *barriques* prior to bottling and then given an additional six months bottle aging prior to release. The 2017 version comes in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a ripe nose of dark berries, black cherries, cigar wrapper, a good base of soil and a well done framing of spicy new French wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully tannic, with a fine core of fruit, good focus and grip and a long, chewy finish. Some of the backend tannins here are

from the new oak and need to be absorbed before the wine really starts to drink well, but it should do so in another year or two. But, this is the perfect example of a wine that would absolutely shine upon release if the *elevage* was done in one and two wine casks, instead of new barrels. I really like the raw materials here and with a bit more sophisticated approach to the oak, this cuvée could go from “good” to “great” in a single vintage. 2022-2040. **89+**.

Chianti

2018 Chianti Classico- Carpineto

Carpineto’s 2018 Chianti Classico *normale* comes in listed at 13.5 percent in this vintage and is quite black fruity in personality from the hot summer. The wine is a blend of traditional Chianti grapes- eighty percent Sangiovese and twenty percent Canaiolo. The wine offers up a nose of black cherries, cassis, balsamic overtones, oregano, gentle tariness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and modestly tannic, with a good core, sound acids and good length and grip on the gently chewy and fairly powerful finish. This is a good result in 2018. 2020-2030. **88**.

2018 Chianti Classico- Luiano

The 2018 Luiano Chianti Classico is composed of a *cépages* of ninety percent Sangiovese, blended with five percent each of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. The wine comes in listed at thirteen percent octane and offers up a ripe and classic nose of red and black cherries, Tuscan herbs, woodsmoke and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, modest tannins, tangy acids and good length and grip on the nicely complex finish. The influence of the cabernet and merlot here is hard to spot, which is just fine for my traditionalist sensibilities. Good juice. 2020-2030. **89**.

2018 Chianti Classico- Monteraponi

The winery of Monteraponi is located in the village of the same name, just next door to Radda , where Monte Vertine produces there superb wines. Michele Braganti started producing wines here from his family vineyards in 2003. Michele’s 2018 Chianti Classico from Monteraponi is composed of a classic blend of ninety-five percent Sangiovese and five percent Canaiolo, with the wine fermented in cement tanks, given an extended, old school maceration period and aged in older oak *botti* for sixteen months prior to bottling. The wine is a gorgeous example of the vintage, offering up a deep, complex and very refined bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil tones, Tuscan herbs and just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and has a lovely core of sappy fruit, with excellent soil signature, suave, modest tannins and a long, tangy and impeccably balanced finish. This is one of the most serious examples of Chianti Classico *normale* that I have tasted in a long, long time! 2020-2035. **92**.

2017 Chianti Classico “La Misse di Candiale”- Candiale

Candiale was started in 2002 by the husband and wife team of Josephin Cramer and Jarkko Peränin (originally from Germany and Finland respectively). They farm nine hectares of vines, mostly planted to Sangiovese on limestone soils. Their La Misse di Candiale is composed of a blend of ninety-eight percent Sangiovese and two percent Canaiolo, with the grapes harvested by hand and fermented and raised in cement vats. The 2017 La Misse offers up a fine nose of red and black cherries, spiced meats, Tuscan herb tones, a fine base of chalky minerality and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy in personality, with a good core, fine soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex and

very nicely balanced, old school finish. This is a properly structured Riserva bottling and needs some time in the cellar to blossom, but all of the constituent components are in place for a fine bottle with a bit of bottle age. 2025-2050. **92.**

2017 Chianti Classico- Fattoria Rodáno

The 2017 Chianti Classico from Fattoria Rodáno is composed of a classic blend of ninety percent Sangiovese and a ten percent blend of Colorino and Canaiolo. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and age for fifteen months in older *botti* prior to bottling. The 2017 is plenty ripe, coming in listed at fifteen percent octane and offers up a fine nose of red and black cherries, lovely spice tones, spit-roasted gamebird, cigar wrapper and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a good core of fruit, moderate, chewy tannins and just a trace of heat on the long finish. This is really pretty well balanced for its alcohol level, and is a very well-made 2017, but still, it is a creature of its vintage. 2020-2035. **88.**

2016 Chianti Classico Riserva- Carpineto

The 2016 Riserva Chianti from Carpineto is the same traditional *cépages* of eighty percent Sangiovese and twenty percent Canaiolo. The bouquet here wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, dark berries, cigar smoke, a bit of roasted meats, a nice base of soil, oregano, a nice array of spices and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and quite classically elegant in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature, suave tannins and a long, complex finish. This is a very good bottle. 2020-2040. **90+.**

2016 Chianti Classico Riserva- Luiano

Luiano's Chianti Riserva is made from one hundred percent Sangiovese. The wine is raised in French oak barrels for two years (no information is supplied about the percentage of new casks) and the 2016 vintage comes in listed at fourteen percent alcohol. The bouquet here offers up lovely depth and nascent complexity, wafting from the glass in a mix of baked red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, a fine base of soil, bonfire, cedar and a bit of browned spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely transparent in personality, with a good, solid core, suave tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex and tangy finish. This is quite good. 2020-2035. **90+.**

2016 Chianti Classico "Vigna Viacosta"- Fattoria Rodáno

The 2016 Chianti Classico "Vigna Viacosta" from Fattoria Rodáno is also a pretty ripe wine this year, coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane. It is made entirely of Sangiovese, with all of the grapes hailing from the south-facing amphitheater of the Viacosta vineyard. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, given a thirty day maceration and aged for fully three years in Slavonian oak *botti* prior to assembling, followed by another six months in cement tanks prior to bottling. The 2016 Vigna Viacosta offers up deep, pure and quite a black fruity bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, cigar wrapper, gently autumnal soil tones, lovely spices and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripely tannic, with broad shoulders, a good core of fruit, lovely complexity and a long, tannic and sturdily youthful finish. I like the aromatic and flavor complexity here quite a bit, and this will be a lovely wine in due course, but it definitely will want some time in the cellar for those backend tannins to relax a bit. 2026-2055. **91.**

2015 Chianti Classico “Gran Selezione”- Carpineto

The Gran Selezione bottling of Chianti from Carpineto is a single vineyard wine and composed entirely from Sangiovese. This two hectare parcel is one of the coolest microclimates in the region, and the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts. The 2015 comes in listed at fourteen percent octane and was raised in French oak barrels. It offers up a pure and youthful bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, fresh oregano, espresso, a good base of soil and smoky French oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced for the cellar, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins and fine focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. I do not usually love the combination of new French oak and Chianti, but it works very well here and this wine should age very nicely. But, give it some bottle age to blossom. 2025-2045. **91+**.

2015 Chianti Classico- Castell’in Villa

The 2015 Chianti Classico *normale* from Castell’in Villa is the winery’s current release in the market, as proprietor Coralia Pignatelli della Leonessa has always crafted long-lived wines and is happy to hold them back for a few years in the cellar prior to release. The estate hand picks all its production, ferments with indigenous yeasts and ages the *normale* for fully two years in *botti* prior to bottling. The 2015 version is composed entirely of Sangiovese and offers up a classic bouquet of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a lovely base of soil, coffee, orange peel and a gentle topnote of Tuscan herbs. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and impressively structured, with an excellent core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, ripe tannins and a long, focused and complex finish. Though this is the estate’s *normale* bottling, it is still a young wine and really could do with a bit of bottle age before it really relaxes and starts to drink with more generosity. It is easy to see how the estate earned the reputation for very long-lived wines, as this is still a puppy! 2022-2040. **89+**.

2015 Chianti Classico “Il Campitello” Riserva- Monteraponi

The Riserva bottling from Michele Braganti is an old vine selection, from fifty-plus year-old vines planted in the very rocky vineyard of Il Campitello, which sits at an elevation of four hundred and twenty meters above sea level. These are the oldest vines on the estate. The blend of the 2015 Il Campitello is ninety percent Sangiovese, seven percent Canaiolo and three percent Colorino and is fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement vats. It is given a forty-five day maceration and aged in older *botti* for twenty-six months prior to bottling. The 2015 version offers up a deep and very complex bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of plum, beautiful spice tones, a fine foundation of soil, gamebird, cedar and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully soil-driven, with a rock solid core of fruit, tangy acids, ripe, fine-grained tannins and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced and nascently complex finish. This lovely wine is built to age and is still several years away from its peak, but is so well balanced that it is eminently drinkable already. Great juice. 2020-2040+. **94**.

2014 Chianti Classico Riserva- Castello di Monsanto

The 2014 Chianti Classico Riserva from Monsanto comes in at fourteen percent octane, which is pretty ripe for the wine and gives it a more black fruity personality than I am accustomed to with this bottling, which had always traditionally been one of my absolute favorites in the region. The nose is still quite youthful, but eventually offers up scents of cassis, cigar ash, Tuscan herb tones, a touch of coffee grounds and a bit of smoky oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tight and youthful, with ripe tannins and a long, closed and slightly bitter finish. The wine seems quite reductive to me and never really opened, despite several hours in decanter. ???



2012 Chianti Classico “Il Poggio” Riserva- Castello di Monsanto

Il Poggio remains a very classically-styled example of Chianti, as the wine is made from a blend of ninety percent Sangiovese and five percent each of Canaiolo and Colorino, but the 2012 comes in at fourteen percent and is a tad riper and more black fruity than the great bottlings of Il Poggio that I cut my teeth on from the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. The 2012 offers up a youthfully complex nose of cassis, black cherries, Tuscan herbs, a good base of soil and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, tannic and focused, with a good core, a bit of uncovered new wood on the backend and a finish that is very hunkered down at the present time and not showing a whole lot of nuance. This too is reductive and does not really open up with extended aeration. ???

2011 Chianti Classico “Riserva”- Villa Antinori

I had not tasted a Chianti Riserva from Villa Antinori in a month of Mondays, so I was very happy to have a chance to try the 2011 version. The wine is ripe, coming in at fourteen percent octane and offers up a black fruity bouquet of black cherries, cigar smoke and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with modest tannins and plenty of backend heat on the simple, but long finish. This seems higher in alcohol than fourteen percent and is a perfectly plausible, modern wine. But, Chianti character? None here that I can find. 2019-2030. **85.**

1971 Chianti Classico “Riserva”- Badia Coltibuono

The 1971 Chianti Classico “Riserva” from Badia Coltibuono is certainly a very mature wine and has been for many, many years, but it is still a good glass of wine at age forty-six and quite a pleasant surprise. 1971 was an outstanding vintage in Chianti and I drank a few of the top bottlings from this year back in the mid-1980s, when they were at their peaks, but I had not seen a bottle of ’71 Chianti for a long, long time prior to this wine. The bouquet is still quite lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of desiccated cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, oregano, lavender and a lovely base of Tuscan soil. On the palate the wine is surprisingly deep, full and nicely autumnal in shading, with a good core, melted tannins and still a fair bit of tangy acidity on the finish. The acids are not volatile and there is admirable complexity still in evidence; the only thing that keeps the score down just a touch is the first hint of oxidation poking out on the backend. But, all in all, given its age, this is really still quite impressive! 2018-2030. **88.**

Rosso Toscano

2019 Cilieggiolo- San Ferdinando

The San Ferdinando estate is located in the southern Chianti region of Colli Aretini, south of Florence. They have ten hectares under vine and today the winemaker here is Simone Zucchetti. Their Cilieggiolo bottling is from a vineyard planted in 2006, and the 2019 version offers up a bright and pure bouquet of cherries, cranberries, Tuscan herb tones, a fine touch of soil, a bit of cherry pit and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, modest tannins and a good chassis of acidity to add lift and brightness on the long finish. Dolcetto has often been called the “Beaujolais of Italy”, but this bottling of Cilieggiolo is far more Beaujolais-like than any Dolcetto I have ever tasted! 2020-2028. **89.**

2018 Dogajolo Toscano Rosso IGT- Carpineto (screwcap)

The 2018 Dogajolo from Carpineto is composed of a blend of eighty percent Sangiovese and twenty percent Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine is designed for early drinking and is bottled six months after the harvest, after a short sojourn in oak barrels. My sample of the 2018 Dogajolo was a touch reductive from its closure when first opened, but with a bit of air blossomed nicely to offer up scents of red and black cherries, a nice base of soil, fresh oregano and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and has really good stuffing in this vintage, with a touch of backend tannin, good balance and grip and a long finish. This is really quite good, but as this is an entry level bottling from Carpineto, I think the winery would be very well-served to think about bottling this under an agglomerated cork, rather than a screwcap. The wine is aimed for relative novices, who are unlikely to recognize a bit of reduction from the screwcap and give the wine aeration, so they may just decide they do not like the bottling. 2020-2026. **88.**

2017 Dinostro- Podere il Castellaccio (Bolgheri)

The Dinostro bottling from Alessandro Scappini’s Podere il Castellaccio is composed entirely of Sangiovese from a vineyard planted to fifty year-old vines. The wine is fermented in oak vats and aged in large *botti* for one year prior to bottling. The 2017 Dinostro offers up a fine nose of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, Tuscan herbs, a good base of soil tones and a touch of nutty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely plump at the core, with good soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. I really like the

backend lift here! Give it a few years in the cellar to soften up a bit more on the backend. Good juice! 2025-2045. **91.**

2017 Somatico- Podere il Castellaccio (Bolgheri)

The cuvée of Somatico from Podere il Castellaccio is also mono-varietal, with the grape in question this time being Pugnitello. The wine is fermented in cement tanks, given about a two week maceration and then aged for one year in *botti* prior to bottling. The 2017 version offers up an excellent nose of sweet dark berries, black cherries, balsamic overtones, dark soil elements, a bit of road tar and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and properly chewy, with a good core, firm, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is quite promising, but needs some bottle age. 2025-2045. **90+.**

2016 Lui di Luiano Rosso Toscano- Luiano

The 2016 Lui di Luiano is a single vineyard *cuvée* comprised of a unique blend of one-third each of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Colorino. The wine is aged for two years in a combination of French and American oak and comes in at 14.5 percent octane in this vintage. The wine offers up excellent aromatic depth in its bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, a touch of coffee grounds, a good base of soil elements, cigar smoke, fresh oregano, spicy oak and a balsamic topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripe, with a fine core, good soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and very good length and grip on the nascently complex and slightly warm finish. This actually carries its alcohol quite well and should age well. It is approachable now, though a touch tannic, but should really hit cruising altitude in five to seven years. 2020-2040. **91.**

2015 Baron' Ugo Rosso Toscano- Monteraponi

Michele Braganti's Baron' Ugo bottling is actually a Chianti Classico Riserva, just like his Il Campitello, but in the 2012 vintage, the wine ended up very light in color and only 12.5 percent octane, so the wine authorities would not grant it the Chianti DOCG. Michele said "fine" and bottled it as a Rosso Toscano IGT (in a Burgundy-shaped bottle) and has continued to do the same since 2012. The wine is made from forty-plus year-old vines, in a vineyard with a soil base of marl, limestone and clay and is composed of the same blend as the Chianti Riserva here (ninety percent Sangiovese, seven percent Canaiolo and three percent Colorino). The wine is initially treated the same in the cellars as the Il Campitello, with fermentation in cement vats with indigenous yeasts, a forty-five day maceration, but then aged in three thousand liter oak *botti* for three years prior to bottling. The wine is superb aromatically in 2015, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of cherries, red plums, roasted *pigeon*, fresh oregano, lovely spic tones, a touch of orange peel, an excellent base of soil, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and utterly refined in profile, with a full-bodied and transparent personality, a lovely core of red fruit, excellent mineral drive, tangy acids and a long, suavely tannic and complex finish. This is quite different in personality than the Il Campitello, as this is more mineral, tangy and transparent in personality, but it too is an absolutely classic example of first class Chianti! 2020-2040+. **94.**

2013 Monrosso "Tuscan Red Blend"- Castello di Monsanto

The 2013 Monrosso from Castello di Monsanto is composed of a blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot, sangiovese and syrah. The wine offers up a bright and wide open nose of red and black cherries, oregano, a touch of pepper and cedar. On the palate the wine is fullish,

focused and modestly tannic, with good youthful complexity and a bit of backend heat poking out uncovered on the fairly long finish. This is listed at 13.5 percent octane but seems a bit higher. Not bad. 2019-2025. **87.**

2012 Ghiaie della Furba- Capezzana

The 2012 Ghiaie della Furba from Capezzana is their “Super Tuscan” bottling and the wine is composed of a *cépages* of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and syrah. The wine spends one year in *barriques* prior to bottling and is given an additional two years of bottle aging in the cellars prior to release. The 2012 Ghiaie della Furba is a classy bottle, offering up a suave bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, a bit of dark chocolate, Cuban cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, fresh oregano and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and classy finish. This is approachable already, but will be even better with a bit more bottle age and I would let it slumber for at least a few more years and allow the tannins to fall away a bit. Impressive. 2022-2050. **91.**

Carmignano

2016 Barco Real di Carmignano- Capezzana

The Barco Real di Carmignano from Capezzana is made of a blend of sangiovese, cabernet sauvignon and canaiolo. The 2016 Barco Real comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a fine, complex nose of black cherries, a touch of road tar, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil, a lovely topnote of Tuscan herb tones and a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and fairly light on its feet, with moderate tannins, good focus, length and grip and just a bit of a new oaky finish. This is a tasty bottle that could use a year or two in the cellar to allow the bit of backend tannin to fall away a bit more, but with a robust meal, one does not really notice them all that much. Good juice. 2021-2040+. **89.**

2015 Carmignano “Villa di Capezzana”- Capezzana

The 2015 Carmignano “Villa di Capezzana” is a bit riper than the Barco Real, coming in at fourteen percent alcohol, but this was a very hot summer after all throughout Europe. The *cépages* here is eighty percent sangiovese and twenty percent cabernet sauvignon and the wine spend one year in cask prior to bottling. The 2015 version offers up a deep and sappy nose of black cherries, woodsmoke, a nice touch of soil, a bit of coffee grounds, a deft framing of new oak and a gently balsamic topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit overripe to my tastes, with a good core, a bit of firm, slightly dry-edged tannin and good length and grip on the slightly chunky finish. I have had great vintages of Villa de Capezzana, but the 2015 is a partial victim of its vintage. 2022-2040+. **84.**

2013 Carmignano Riserva “Trefiano” - Capezzana

The 2013 Carmignano Riserva “Trefiano” from Capezzana is composed of a blend of sangiovese, cabernet sauvignon and canaiolo and is aged for sixteen months in *tonneaux* prior to bottling. The wine takes its name from the Villa Trefiano, a renaissance estate which the two hectares of vineyards surround. The 2013 Trefiano is a ripe wine, coming in at a full fourteen percent, but it is very nicely balanced and carries its octane quite well. The bouquet offers up a blend of black cherries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a discreet touch of Tuscan herbs and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off a good core of fruit, with

firm, well-integrated tannins and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This needs some time in the cellar to blossom properly, but will be a good wine in due course. 2023-2050. **89+**.

Vino Nobile di Montepulciano

2015 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano “Riserva”- Carpineto

The 2015 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano “Riserva” from Carpineto is composed of a blend of ninety percent Sangiovese and ten percent Canaiolo. The wine is raised in a combination of used Slavonian and French oak barrels, with the majority being Slavonian wood, for two years prior to bottling. The wine is then given an additional ten months of bottle aging prior to release; the 2015 version here comes in at 13.4 percent alcohol. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of cherries, red plums, woodsmoke, a bit of gamebird, coffee, a lovely base of soil, a touch of oregano, lavender and smoky oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil signature and grip, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, poised and very classy finish. This is first class Vino Nobile! 2020-2040+. **92.**

Maremma

2014 Poggio Bestiale- Fattoria di Magliano

The 2014 Poggio Bestiale from Fattoria di Magliano has a *cépages* of forty percent Cabernet Sauvignon, twenty-five percent Cabernet Franc, twenty percent Merlot and five percent Petit Verdot. It is a single vineyard bottling, with the vineyard taking its name similarly to the Monts Damnés in Chavignol, as this very steep vineyard is considered a “beast” to cultivate. The wine is raised in cask for sixteen months, in a combination of new, one wine and two wine barrels. The wine offers up an excellent and quite transparent nose of cherries, fresh oregano, lovely spice tones, a bit of coffee, a fine base of soil and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and full-bodied, with a good core, tangy acids, fine-grained tannins and excellent soil signature on the long, complex and nicely balanced finish. This is very different from most of the cabernet-based wines I taste from Italy these days, as this wine is unrepentantly Italian in personality and I really like this characteristic. The wine might be even better if the new oak was left out of the cellar regimen and it was raised entirely in one, two and three wine casks, as this would even further highlight the lovely soil tones here! It is quite approachable today, but will probably be even better with a handful of years in the cellar. Good juice. 2023-2040+. **90+**.

Morellino di Scansano

2016 Morellino di Scansano “Heba”- Fattoria di Magliano

The 2016 Morellino di Scansano “Heba” from Fattoria di Magliano is composed of a blend of ninety-five percent Sangiovese and five percent Syrah, with the wine raised for six months in cement vats prior to bottling. It offers up a bright and spicy bouquet of cherries, a bit of orange peel, woodsmoke, a nice base of soil and a topnote of lovely spice tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and gently rustic in personality, but with a good core of fruit, tangy acids, modest tannins and a long, bouncy finish. This a good, solid example of Morellino, but it is not overly ripe, so is best in the company of food, as the backend can be just a touch sour if sipped on its own. 2020-2027. **88.**



Rosso di Montalcino

2017 Rosso di Montalcino- Carpineto

2017 Rosso di Montalcino from Carpineto is made entirely from Sangiovese Grosso and is aged for six months in Slavonian oak casks prior to bottling. The 2017 comes in at fourteen percent octane and delivers a very fine nose of plums, cherries, cigar wrapper, a touch of Tuscan herbs, a lovely base of soil and a nice hint of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, suave, moderate tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This is quite Brunello-like in profile and is a very well-made bottle of Rosso di Montalcino! 2020-2035. **91.**

2014 Rosso di Montalcino- Stella di Campalto

Stella di Campalto and her family purchased this estate, formerly known as Podere San Giuseppe, in 1992, as the property had been abandoned during World War II and never really resuscitated subsequently. She has worked painstakingly to bring back the vineyards, which she began farming organically in 1996 and was certified biodynamic in 2005. The winemaking here is also non-interventionist, with indigenous yeast fermentation in old oak vats, followed by twenty-one months *elevage* in older *tonneaux* before bottling and twenty-seven months of bottle aging in the cellars before release! The 2014 Rosso is a lovely wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, strawberries, oregano, a beautifully refined base of soil, woodsmoke, cinnamon and a topnote of dried roses. On the

palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and marvelously transparent in personality, with a good core of red fruit, suave, fine-grained tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long, complex and utterly refined finish. This is a gorgeous and very Burgundian expression of Rosso di Montalcino! 2020-2035. **92.**

Brunello di Montalcino

1999 Brunello di Montalcino “Riserva”- Fattoria Poggio di Sotto

The 1999 Brunello di Montalcino “Riserva” from Poggio di Sotto is a lovely wine. The bouquet is deep, complex and pure, offering up scents of cherries, Tuscan herb tones, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, gentle new oakiness and a topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still nicely plump in the mid-palate, with fine focus and grip, well-integrated, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the poised and well-balanced finish. This is a fine example. 2019-2040+. **92.**

1993 Brunello di Montalcino “Case Basse”- Giancarlo Soldera

I owned a case of the Soldera 1993 Case Basse and I cannot believe that I drank it as quickly as I did! This was the last bottle out of a dozen very, very satisfying examples, and it was stellar. The bouquet is pure and really at its peak right now, offering up a complex blend of cherries, red plums, fresh herb tones, coffee, a nice touch of nutskin and a very complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, still a touch of backend tannin and a long, poised and utterly refined finish. Great juice- wish I had bought two cases! 2019-2040+. **95.**

1990 Brunello di Montalcino “Case Basse” Riserva- Giancarlo Soldera

In theory, the 1990 Case Basse Riserva from Giancarlo Soldera should be a step up from the lovely 1993 *normale*, but in fact, the wines are quite close in quality, with the 1990 perhaps just a touch deeper on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is stunning, wafting from the glass in a mix of plums, chocolate, grilled venison, bonfire, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and more opulent on the attack than the 1993, with a plus core of fruit, great precision and grip, melting tannins and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is a bit riper than the 1993, so it has a bit more muscle and plushness at the core, but it only just noses out that underrated 1993 Case Basse! 2019-2050. **96.**

Montepulciano d’Abruzzo

2015 Montepulciano d’Abruzzo- Plenus (Marina Palusci)

This bottle got lost in my cellar and has probably been here for three or four years, which worried me a bit, as it is sealed under a screwcap. However, the wine has aged nicely under the screw and is drinking beautifully today, offering up a deep and nicely black fruity nose of dark berries, woodsmoke, a bit of roasted game, a fine base of dark soil tones and just a whisper of balsamic tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a plush core, still a fair bit of backend tannin and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This is really good Montepulciano and I am very sorry I lost the bottle in my cellar for all those years! 2020-2030. **90.**

Veneto

2016 Valpolicella Ripasso “Ca’ del Laito” Classico Superiore- Bussola

The 2016 Valpolicella Ripasso “Ca’ del Laito” Classico Superiore from Tommaso Bussola is made all from very low yielding, old vines. The wine comes in at 14.5 percent and offers up a deep, complex and vibrant bouquet of sweet blackberries, a bit of red currant, a gorgeous array of spice tones, a fine foundation of soil, a touch of new leather and a topnote of sultana raisin. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very expressive, with superb focus and grip, a beautiful core of fruit, fine mineral drive and bounce and a long, tangy and moderately tannic finish. There is a bit of backend heat here, but it really is buried in superb synthesis of the gorgeous fruit and mineral undertow, and though it is really a bit out of my typical comfort zone for octane, I have no trouble drinking this wine! 2020-2040. **92.**

2015 Recioto della Valpolicella Ripasso Classico- Bussola

The 2015 Recioto della Valpolicella Ripasso Classico from Tommaso Bussola is a gorgeous wine, coming in at twelve percent octane and carrying a nice glaze of residual sugar. The wine wafts from the glass in a complex blend of desiccated black cherries and dark berries, raisins, dark soil tones, hung game, lovely spice tones and a topnote of cigar wrapper. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full-bodied and tangy, with a great core of fruit, superb focus and grip, very good acids and a long, sweet and very complex finish. This just calls out for a snowy Saturday afternoon in January, with a fire on the hearth. 2020-2050. **94.**

1997 Amarone- Serego Alghieri (Masi)

The last vintage I drank of this bottling was from the early 1980s, so I have not had this wine in a long, long time. I loved it back in the 1980s, but I do not really know what to make of this 1997 version, as this is far higher in alcohol than the 1982, coming in listed at a whopping 15.5 percent octane. The nose is overripe, prune and tarry, but at least complex, offering up notes of dried out dark berries, prunes, raisins, chocolate, hung game and muddy soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, a bit hot and rock solid at the core, with melted tannins, surprisingly good focus and grip and a long, complex and fairly heady finish. Given its octane level, this is actually pretty well balanced, but I cannot say that I would be able to finish a glass at 15.5 percent. But, for the intrepid with a designated drive, it really is not all that bad. I am quite surprised! 2020-2040. **88.**

1976 Amarone- Bertani

I have always thought of Bertani as a good, solid producer in the Veneto, but not in the top division and this 1976 Amarone does not dissuade me from this perception. The wine is fully mature and offers up pretty good aromatic complexity in its mix of raisins, desiccated black cherries, road tar, chocolate, herb tones and soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite powerful for its age, with a good core, still some backend tannin and good length and grip on the fairly well-balanced finish. A good, solid, slightly four-square example with plenty of life in it. 2019-2040. **89.**



The beautiful mosaic of undulating vineyard hills and overlooking mountains in Campania.

Taurasi and Irpinia Aglianico

2015 Aglianico- Tenuta Scuotto

The 2015 Aglianico I.G.P. bottling from Tenuta Scuotto is hand-harvested and produced from vineyards that are now fifteen to twenty years of age. The wine is aged for one year in stainless steel tank and comes in at 13.5 percent octane. It delivers a fine aromatic blend of dark berries, black cherries, a bit of saddle leather, a fine base of volcanic soil and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with good, but not great depth at the core, just a whisper of backend tannin and lovely balance and grip on the long and wide open finish. This is well-made and very tasty. 2020-2030. **89.**

2014 Taurasi Riserva “Puro Sangue”- Luigi Tecce (Paternopoli)

The Puro Sangue bottling from *maestro* Luigi Tecce is from one of his younger vineyards, with the vines seventeen years of age in 2014, as this parcel was planted in 1997 to a combination of *selection massale* from his eighty year-old vines and some selected clones from the nursery. The 2014 Puro Sangue Riserva was aged for two years, one in *tonneaux* and one in large, old *botti*, prior to bottling, and then given three more years of bottle aging in the cellar prior to release. It is a ripe wine in 2014, tipping in at fifteen percent octane, but offering admirable purity and precision in its bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, saddle leather, cigar ash, roasted venison, a bit of coffee grounds and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the

palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe, firm tannins, fine focus and grip, the good acidity of this high altitude section of the Taurasi DOCG and superb length and grip on the nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This carries its alcohol most impressively, and though there is just a touch of backend heat, I have no doubt this wine will age very well indeed. 2030-2075+. **91+**.

2014 Taurasi Riserva “Poliphemo” Vecchie Vigne- Luigi Tecce (Paternopoli)

The Poliphemo Riserva is Luigi’s old vine cuvée, as this is the wine he makes from his eighty-five year old vines that were planted by his grandfather. Like all of his wines, it is fermented in open top, chestnut *tini* and macerates for forty days, prior to being racked into older oak *tonneaux* for its first year of *elevage*. It then is racked into large, old *botti* for its second year in wood, before being bottled. The 2014 vintage is the first that Luigi decided to extend his bottle aging regimen for this Taurasi to a full two years; previously it had been fifteen to eighteen months, depending on the vintage. The 2014 Poliphemo Riserva is again ripe, in the style of the vintage, coming in at fifteen percent alcohol, but offering up great aromatic purity in its constellation of black cherries, cassis, Cuban cigar wrapper, a great base of dark soil tones, new leather, woodsmoke and roasted meats. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, elegant in personality and rock solid at the core, with outstanding focus and grip, a great signature of soil, firm, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. The old vines here give the wine a more elegant and complete profile. Again, there is just a whisper of backend heat here, but the wine will age long and gracefully. 2030-2075+. **93**.

2013 Taurasi Riserva “Puro Sangue”- Luigi Tecce (Paternopoli)

The 2013 vintage was a more classic one in Campania, so the Puro Sangue Riserva from Luigi Tecce comes in at a more customary 14.5 percent octane. The wine delivers a beautifully complex and classic nose of dark berries, cassis, cigar smoke, hung game, dark soil tones and a topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a marvelous core of fruit, good soil signature and grip, ripe, quite suave tannins and a long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. The difference in just a half point of octane between the 2014 and 2013 version is quite evident in terms of the precision of the flavors and aromatics, not to mention far more suave texture to the still properly firm tannins. Great juice. 2028-2085. **94**.

2013 Taurasi Riserva “Poliphemo” Vecchie Vigne- Luigi Tecce (Paternopoli)

The old vine Poliphemo Taurasi from Luigi Tecce is stellar in 2013. The wine also is 14.5 percent alcohol and delivers classic complexity and breed in its old vine blend of black cherries, dark berries, saddle leather, Cuban cigar wrapper, a complex base of volcanic soil, fire pit and a bit of chipotle pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and absolutely classic in profile, with a great core of old vine fruit, superb mineral drive and grip, firm, ripe and buried tannins and a long, vibrant and very complex finish. This is a young wine and is going to take plenty of time to reach its apogee, but it is impeccably balanced and as fine an example of young Taurasi as I have ever tasted! 2030-2085+. **95+**.

2013 Taurasi- Tenuta Scuotto

The Taurasi from Eduardo Scuotto hails from a twenty year-old vineyard, which he harvests by hand. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged for twelve months in French *barriques* prior to bottling. The 2013 vintage here comes in listed at fourteen percent octane and offers up an impressively complex bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, a good base of almost salty soil tones, roasted meats, cigar wrapper and a touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and nicely balanced, with a rock solid core, firm,

chewy tannins and just a bit of heat perking up the long and nascently complex finish. This is a touch heady, as some Taurasi can be these days, but it is really pretty well balanced for its octane level and my gut feeling is that it will age quite nicely. I certainly like both its aromatic and flavor complexity right out of the blocks! 2030-2075. **91.**

2013 Taurasi “Santandrea”- Vinosia (Luciano Ercolino)

The 2013 Taurasi “Santandrea” from Luciano Ercolino is produced from pretty young vines, as this vineyard was planted in 1997. The fruit is machine-harvested and raised in French oak barrels for fourteen months, prior to bottling. The 2013 comes in at just a whisper over fourteen percent octane and offers up a deep and promising bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of roasted meats, dark soil tones and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good, respectable core, ripe tannins and a long, well-balanced finish. This is a good, solid wine, but one gets the sense that it could be far more serious if harvested by hand. 2025-2045. **88.**

2011 Taurasi Riserva “Rajamagra”- Vinosia (Luciano Ercolino)

The Rajamagra Riserva Taurasi from Vinosia hails from a different vineyard than the regular bottling, but it was also planted in the mid-1990s (1996) and is also hand-harvested. The wine is riper than the 2013 *normale*, coming in at 14.6 percent and was aged eighteen months in French casks. It offers up a deep, ripe and powerful bouquet of cassis, a bit of road tar, roasted game, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, broad-shouldered and shows just a touch of *sur maturité*, with a good core, chewy, slightly gritty tannins and a long,. Powerful and really, quite well-balanced finish (particularly for its octane). This again is a good, respectable bottle of Taurasi, but it is not in the top division and I would love to taste this wine with the grapes picked by hand. 2030-2050. **88.**

1977 Lacryma Christi del Vesuvio Rosso- Mastroberardino

The 1977 Lacryma Christi del Vesuvio from Mastroberardino is composed of a blend of Aglianico and Piediroso (today this wine is made entirely from Piediroso). At forty-three years of age it remains right in its apogee of peak drinkability, with a dark color and offering up a deep and complex nose of dark berries, desiccated black cherries, cigar smoke, volcanic soil tones, cigar ash, chipotle pepper and a discreet touch of upper register botanicals. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, suave and velvety in texture, with melted tannins, a fine core of fruit, lovely tertiary soil tones and a long, complex and still quite vigorous finish. This is a beautiful bottle of fully mature Campanian Rosso that is still in command of its full faculties and is drinking with style and grace. 2020-2030+. **91.**

Sardegna

2018 Cannonau di Sardegna- Antonella Corda

Antonella Corda started her eponymous winery in 2010, with fifteen hectares of vines she inherited from her well-known winemaking father, Antonio Argiolas. She ferments here Cannonau with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and raises the wine in a combination of both tank and older oak casks. The 2018 Cannonau offers up a lovely nose of bitter cherry, woodsmoke, roses, salty soil tones and a hint of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, tangy acids, modest tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. I love the

interplay here of sweet and bitter elements on the backend. This is very good juice. 2020-2030. 91.



Etna Rosso

2018 La Vigne di Gioacchino- Azienda Agricola Sofia

The Sofia family has been growing vines on the north side of Mount Etna for several generations, but Gioacchino Sofia only started making a little wine a decade or so ago and selling it to locals. In 2017, his children, Carmelo and Valentina decided to make this a full-time profession and released their first “official” vintage. This bottling is made from a blend of fruit from a twenty year-old vineyard and one planted fully sixty years ago, with all of it having been farmed organically and planted to Nerello Mascalese. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in old *tonneaux* for fourteen months, prior to a blending and finishing in cement vats. The 2018 offers up a fine nose of desiccated cherries, orange peel, bonfire, lovely volcanic soil tones, roasted game and a nice dollop of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully transparent in personality, with lovely intensity of flavor, bouncy acids, moderate tannins and a long, complex finish. This is nicely light on its feet in style, but has plenty of personality and potential. 2024-2045. 90.

2017 Ripiddu- Filippo Grasso

Filippo Grasso is the fourth generation of his family to run this family estate, in the village of Randazzo, on the north side of Mount Etna. However, he is also the first of his family to start estate bottling, which he did in 2006. His Ripiddu bottling is composed of a blend of ninety percent Nerello Mascalese and ten percent Nerello Mantellato. The vines here are farmed organically and the wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel. The 2017 Ripiddu comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a fine and complex nose of cherries, quince, volcanic minerality, hung game, balsam bough and just a hint of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and has an excellent core of fruit, with fine soil signature, ripe, buried tannins, tangy acids and a long, ripe and complex finish. This is an outstanding wine in the making- just give it a bit of time for the tannins to soften up a bit. 2025-2055+. **92.**

2017 Capu Chiurma- Filippo Grasso

Signor Grasso's Capu Chiurma bottling is his oldest vine cuvée, made from a blend of ninety-five percent Nerello Mascalese and five percent Nerello Mantellato. Like the Ripiddu, it is fermented and aged solely in stainless steel tanks. The 2017 Capu Chiurma also comes in tipping the scales at 14.5 percent and delivers superb depth and complexity in its aromatic constellation of black cherries, dark berries, balsamic overtones, volcanic soil, a nice touch of botanicals and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused, chewy and sports outstanding mid-palate depth, with good mineral drive, chewy, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is going to need a few more years in the cellar than the Ripiddu bottling to soften up, but it is going to be excellent as well in due course. 2027-2055+. **93.**

2010 Nerello Mascalese- Calabretta

The 2010 Nerello Mascalese from Massimiliano Calabretta is all produced from organically-farmed vines that range from seventy to eighty years of age. Massimiliano ages the wine for six or seven years in old *botti* prior to bottling! The 2010 is stunningly pure and complex on the nose, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of fresh and desiccated cherries, hung game, woodsmoke, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, a bit of orange peel and a topnote of fresh oregano. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, great mineral drive and grip, ripe tannins and a long, balanced and very classy finish. This is an exceptional, old school wine, which at ten years of age is just starting to stretch its wings and will be even better another ten years down the road! 2020-2050+. **93+.**

**BODEGAS RIOJANAS’
BEAUTIFUL RIOJA BOTTLING OF VIÑA ALBINA**



I wrote an historical feature on Bodegas Riojanas back in Issue 86. At that time, I mentioned that the article was based primarily on a great vertical tasting of one of the estate’s two flagship Rioja bottlings, their Monte Real, which had been held here in New York for journalists back in the spring of 2019. At that time, the plan from the principals at Bodegas Riojanas had been to do a similar vertical of their other iconic Rioja bottling, Viña Albina, soon after, and I had been waiting for that event to occur prior to writing my article on this marvelous Rioja estate. When the coronavirus put the damper on plans for the Viña Albina vertical this year, I went ahead and wrote my piece on Bodegas Riojanas back in April. During the course of my research on that piece, I was in contact with Josetxo Soria, the Global Marketing Director for the estate, with quite some frequency trying to get historical detail for the article. After it was released, Josetxo sent me a note saying the winery wanted to go ahead and send me a vertical of their Viña Albina Gran Reserva, as the ongoing coronavirus pandemic was making it likely that the originally planned tasting was not going to be able to be held anytime soon. Needless to say, I was like a ten year-old boy on Christmas morning when the shipment of Viña Albina arrived at my door! I did my best to exercise patience and let the bottles recover from their flight across the Atlantic, so did not start to taste the wines until a short time before the deadline for the new issue

of the newsletter. Let me just say that it is not easy to see fifteen vintages of Viña Albina Gran Reserva going all the way back to 1942 resting comfortably in the cellar and not wish to open them right away!

As I mentioned in my feature on the estate two issues back, I have always considered Bodegas Riojanas one of the “Big Six” of great traditionalist Rioja estates, alongside of López de Heredia, Cuné, La Rioja Alta, Marqués de Riscal and Marqués de Murrietta. I will not go into great detail of the history of Bodegas Riojanas here, referring readers back to the history of this great estate in Cenicero that was published in Issue 86. However, I will mention again that the two iconic bottlings of red Rioja here are the winery’s Monte Real and Viña Albina. Here in the United States, the Monte Real is probably the better-known of these two cuvées, but it was actually the Viña Albina that was the first of these two bottlings to be created and marketed by Bodegas Riojanas. The winery was founded in 1890 and Viña Albina was to make its debut in 1901, but almost exclusively as a white wine! In this era, the twenty hectare vineyard of *Viña Albina* was planted solely with white wine grape varieties at the turn of the twentieth century. The first release of Viña Albina Blanco was in 1901 and it was the produced from the 1900 vintage, so one can see that the tradition of barrel aging of white Rioja was not yet prevalent at the top Rioja estates back at the turn of the twentieth century. I had written back in April that it took some years for Viña Albina Tinto to make its own debut, but it turns out that the bodegas has records of a very small amount of red wine released under this label around the same time frame as the Blanco, so there was actually a small quantity of Viña Albina Rioja Tinto also produced from the 1900 vintage!

Though this feature focuses on the great red Rioja bottlings that wear the Viña Albina label, the estate continues to produce both reds and whites under this flagship brand name. As I noted in the historical piece on Bodegas Riojanas, both the wine and the vineyard were originally named in honor of the daughter of one of the partners in the bodegas at this time: Albina Carreras. The 1900 Viña Albina Blanco gets the credit as the very first “bottled wine” ever sold by Bodegas Riojanas, as prior to the release of this 1900 vintage in 1901, the estate had exclusively sold their red and white wines in bulk. Today, from this original white grape vineyard of Viña Albina, still five hectares of the twenty hectare parcel remain planted to white grapes and these are currently used for the production of Bodegas Riojanas’ late harvest, sweet white wine bottling, Viña Albina Dulce “Vendimia Tardía”. In addition to the late harvest Dulce bottling, there also remains a small amount of white wine made and marketed under the Viña Albina label, including a “Semi-Dulce” bottling and a dry Viña Albina Blanco, with these white wines crafted from grapes that are grown in parcels outside of their traditional namesake vineyard. However, despite its historical foundation as a white wine, the vast majority of wine sold by the estate under the Viña Albina label today is Rioja Tinto, as the red wines are sold at the levels of Crianza, Reserva and Gran Reserva, as well as a “Reserva Seleccionada”.

As the original *Viña Albina* vineyard was planted exclusively to white grapes when the brand was launched in 1901, when the brand was expanded to include barrel-aged red wines, vineyard sources had to be allocated to the red wines of Viña Albina. Since the first release of the 1900 vintage of Viña Albina Tinto (presumably a year or two after the Blanco made its debut), the grapes have come from a range of different villages in the cooler Rioja Alta region, including the bodegas’ home village of Cenicero, as well as neighboring towns such as San

Vicente de la Sonsierra, Ávalos, Peciña and Rivas de Tereso. Viña Albina comes bottled in a Bordeaux-shaped bottle, whereas Monte Real is bottled in a Burgundy-shaped bottle, and this is to signal to customers the different stylistic emphasis of each cuvée. Much like the Cuné winery does with their Imperial and Viña Real bottlings, Bodegas Riojanas uses the Bordeaux-shaped bottle for their more elegantly-styled Rioja of Viña Albina, with the Burgundy-shaped bottle for the more robust and broader-shouldered Monte Real. This has been a fairly consistent practice at most important Rioja bodegas since at least the middle of the twentieth century, with the notable exception of López de Heredia, which uses the Burgundy-shaped bottles for their more elegant cuvée of Viña Bosconia, and the Bordeaux-shaped bottle for the bigger-boned Viña Tondonia. But, to my knowledge, pretty much all of the other top traditional Rioja producers use the bottle system utilized at Bodegas Riojanas and Cuné.

As the Viña Albina Tinto has always been positioned as the more elegant of these two top Rioja bottlings at Bodegas Riojanas, some different vineyard sources had to be cultivated for this wine in comparison to those used for the Monte Real (though the one hundred and fifty hectare *El Monte* vineyard owned by the estate remains the foundation for both bottlings). In the feature on the winery two issues ago, I spoke with Bodegas Riojanas' long-time Technical Director Felipe Nalda Frías (who still sits on the board of directors for the winery, after more than forty years making the wines here) and his nephew, Emilio Sojo Nalda, who has taken over the Cellar Master position since 2006, about what vineyard sources the winery principals looked to for their Viña Albina Tinto bottlings. As the two gentlemen noted, "the vineyards used for Viña Albina are mostly higher altitude, which allows for fresher wines" with which to craft the more elegant style that is the hallmark of this cuvée. Much of this higher altitude fruit can come from sections of the estate's flagship *El Monte* vineyard, as it sits at four hundred and fifty meters above sea level in the area around Cenicero. During much of the twentieth century, the *cépages* of Monte Real and Viña Albina were quite similar, with the customary blend being approximately eighty percent Tempranillo, fifteen percent Mazuelo and five percent Graciano. This varietal blend has continued on for the Viña Albina bottlings, but the Monte Real has been composed entirely from Tempranillo since the 1998 vintage. Both flagship bottlings at Bodegas Riojanas continued to be aged exclusively in American oak casks (even after the change to one hundred percent Tempranillo for the Monte Real) up until the 2013 vintage here, when the Monte Real cuvée began to be raised in a fifty-fifty blend of American and French oak barrels. Viña Albina, on the other hand, has continued to be raised exclusively in American oak barrels, so that the stylistic profiles of the two bottlings is even a bit more pronounced than was the case back in 1980s and 1990s.

Today, Bodegas Riojanas ages their Viña Albina Reserva and Gran Reserva bottlings for two or two and a half years in American oak barrels prior to bottling, with the time spent in cask tailored to the structural style of a given vintage. The two wines are now raised slightly differently, with the Reserva cuvée of Viña Albina aged for its first year in "one wine" barrels of American oak, whereas the Gran Reserva spends its first year in the cellars in new American oak barrels. For the second year of barrel aging in the cellars, the lots of Reserva are racked into the same "one wine" casks, whereas the Gran Reservas are racked into three year-old American oak barrels for their second twelve month period in cask. This second stage of the barrel aging can be extended out an additional six months for the Gran Reserva if the style of the vintage merits more time in cask prior to bottling. Once the wines are deemed ready for bottling, the Viña

Albina Reservas are given at least one year of bottle aging in the cellars before they are considered for the market, Gran Reservas receive a minimum of three years of additional bottle aging before they can be shipped into the market. A generation ago, the aging patterns for the two wines was a bit longer than it is today, as no new casks were used for Gran Reserva and it was not uncommon for the wines to spend four, five or even six years in barrel before they would be bottled. As Josetxo Soria notes, “in this era, new barrels were only purchased if there was an expansion of the winery’s cellars” and so, barrel aging was a bit longer in the older casks.

Given the different aging regimens of Viña Albina Reserva and Gran Reserva, it is not surprising that the two wines also begin their respective lives as vineyard selections, as grapes from different parcels of the bodegas’ vineyards are earmarked for each wine. As Señor Soria continues, “selection is made at the vineyard source, for the Gran Reserva we choose the grapes from the highest altitude parcels, to preserve the point of freshness and the higher acidity, which will favor the longevity of the wine’s color and aromatics.” For the Reserva bottling, the goal will be to pick parcels a bit lower in altitude and which will provide a bit more early accessibility when the wine is released into the market, three years after the vintage. I should note that though the goal is produce a Viña Albina Reserva that is more ready to drink when it is younger, this does not preclude its ability to also age very well, as prior to my tasting the 1952 Gran Reserva bottling of Viña Albina for this article, the most recent note I had on a Viña Albina from this legendary vintage was the Reserva bottling, which was still drinking beautifully at more than fifty years of age! But, the Gran Reserva bottling of Viña Albina is the true long distance runner of the pair, and as the notes below will attest, it ages easily for as many decades and as gracefully as any of the best-known cuvées of Rioja from the “Big Six” of Rioja’s great traditionalist estates.

Additionally, while Viña Albina is the more elegantly-styled wine of the two flagship bottlings of Rioja at Bodegas Riojanas, it does not mean that it is inherently any less age-worthy than their slightly broader-shouldered bottling of Monte Real. Much could be said in this regard as well for the Imperial versus the Viña Real bottlings at Cuné. Viña Albina is most assuredly as long-lived as Monte Real, and having now tasted the Viña Albina Gran Reserva all the way back to 1942, it seems quite clear that this bottling, as it is crafted today, can easily last from seventy-five to one hundred years out from the vintage, as has been the case since the cuvée’s inception in the first few years of the twentieth century. It will always be the more elegant, slightly lighter-bodied wine *vis à vis* Monte Real, but this in no way compromises its ability to age for many, many decades. Viña Albina Gran Reserva does not start out life when released from the bodegas as a particularly powerful example of Rioja. As the 2011 is the newest release of the Viña Albina Gran Reserva, one can see that the three years of bottle aging in the cellars is indeed, only a minimum, as the new release already has nearly a decade of age on it prior to its issuing forth from Cenicero. From the outset, Viña Albina is always very elegant and refined in its aromatic and flavor profile. But, as the decades roll by and the wine continues to blossom with further bottle age, it does not really lose any of its initial weight or intensity of flavor either, it just keeps unfolding like a rose showing more and more aspects of its complexity, without losing the initial beauty it already possessed when it was first released. And, though Viña Albina is not a particularly big wine when first hitting the market, it does indeed possess a very good foundation of ripe, beautifully-integrated tannin in every vintage, so that it definitely continues to improve

with further bottle age, allowing for the suave and very well-integrated chassis of tannin to further soften up and eventually melt away as the wine really hits its apogee.



While Viña Albina is certainly approachable- either as Reserva or Gran Reserva- when the wines are first released from the bodegas' cellars in Cenicero, I always prefer to drink the Reserva wines during that first decade after their release, and hold back the Gran Reservas in my cellar for further bottle aging. It is not that they are not very tasty when younger, as the inherent elegance of both the Reserva and Gran Reserva versions of Viña Albina make them amongst the most delicious, classical examples of Rioja to drink in their relative youth. But, to my palate, Viña Albina Gran Reserva really deserves another decade's worth of bottle aging after its release, prior to starting to drink the wines with abandon, as around age twenty seems to be where the wines really begin to blossom completely and show all of their inherent complexity, grace and charm. This general rule of thumb, of course, varies by vintage characteristics, but at least for top quality years in Rioja, such as 2011, 2008, 2005, 2004, 2001 and the like, where the young wines have a good underlying chassis of ripe tannin, the twenty year mark is really a good point to begin thinking about starting to drink the wines. I should mention that I am not always aligned with the general vintage assessments in Rioja these days, as several sources continue to rank the ripest, most powerful vintages in the region as the "best", but in this era of global warming, I am quite sure that this is not the most useful metric for measuring quality anymore in Rioja. My gut feeling is that some of these riper, more recent vintages will not age as long and

gracefully as some of their cooler vintage counterparts, and as readers will see in the notes that follow, for some of these riper vintages, I suggest starting to drink the wines a bit before their twentieth birthdays and do not anticipate their being as long-lived as other recent vintages that may not possess quite the same ripeness and power.

But, what I hope is also recognized from the notes that follow is just how consistent Viña Albina Gran Reserva is from vintage to vintage. Even in the more difficult years in the region, such as the moderately ripe year of 2007 or the drought year of 2006 (which also suffered from spring frosts), the team at Bodegas Riojanas manages to make truly excellent wines under their Viña Albina Gran Reserva label. Even the frost-damaged, lighter vintage of 1999 in Rioja has produced a truly lovely, complex middleweight version of Viña Albina Gran Reserva and a wine that is most emphatically not an “off vintage” wine! Before starting my very pleasurable tasting research for this article, I had no idea just how consistently excellent Viña Albina Gran Reserva is from vintage to vintage, with the wines always very much having their stylistic foundations in the personalities of their respective vintages, but also, delivering consistently excellent wines, whether or not a given vintage happens to have a great reputation or not. The wines from the slightly “lesser” vintages will often drink a bit sooner than those from the classically “great” years, so that they are often the more interesting wines to reach for at ages twelve or fifteen, but they also possess plenty of potential for longevity as well and they are always wines of serious merit in their own right. And, the Viña Albina Gran Reservas from the finest vintages are clearly to be numbered amongst Rioja’s greatest wines! As they are currently not as well known in the market as wines such as López de Heredia’s Viña Bosconia or Viña Tondonia, Cuné’s bottlings of Imperial or Viña Real, or La Rioja Alta’s 904 or 890 Rioja Gran Reservas, Bodegas Riojanas’ Viña Albina Gran Reserva may well be the very finest value still to be found amongst the elite cuvées of Rioja. But, don’t take my word for it- go out and buy yourself a few bottles of the beautiful, soon to be released 2011 or the 2010 Viña Albina Gran Reserva and decide for yourself. You will be glad that you did!

The following notes are arranged chronologically and only the 2013 Viña Albina Reserva and 2010 Viña Albina Gran Reserva appeared in the April feature on Bodegas Riojanas and its long and illustrious history in the region. I include them here again for ease of location, though I did not taste them again for this article. As you will notice when looking at the note on the 2010 Gran Reserva, I have come to better understand the aging potential for this bottling of Viña Albina, and if I were to adjust that note in any way, I would certainly extend out its potential drinking window to at least 2080. But, I try to never change tasting notes that have appeared in other articles when including them in a more recent piece, so the window of expected drinkability for the fine 2010 Gran Reserva remains as it was printed a few months ago, though I feel the wine will clearly drink beautifully for several more decades than I initially anticipated.

Viña Albina Reserva

2013 Viña Albina Rioja “Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The 2013 Viña Albina Rioja “Reserva” is a beautifully refined and classic bottle in the making from Bodegas Riojanas. The bouquet is still youthful, but precise and very promising, wafting from the glass in a mix of black raspberries, black cherries, cigar smoke, cloves, a touch of nutskin, excellent soil tones and a fine framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and potentially quite velvety, with a good core, excellent soil signature, suave tannins

and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is still a tad on the young side for primetime drinking (though certainly approachable), but all of the constituent components are in place for a fine, long and refined life in bottle! A first class Reserva. 2022-2050+. **91.**

Viña Albina Gran Reserva

2011 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The newest release of Gran Reserva from the Viña Albina lineup is the lovely 2011 vintage. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane this year and delivers a refined, youthful aromatic constellation of cherries, red plums, toasted coconut, beautiful spice tones, a whisper of the nutskin and a lovely foundation of American oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and velvety on the attack, with a lovely core, great soil signature and grip, suave tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully complex finish. This is gorgeous, elegant, classic Rioja in the making! It is so seamlessly balanced that it is already quite approachable, though still a young wine, and I would try to keep my hands off of it for another decade and really let it start hitting on all cylinders. That said, it is already providing an awful lot of pleasure in the glass! 2030-2085. **94.**

2010 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The 2010 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva” from Bodegas Riojanas is an outstanding wine. At nine years of age it is starting to really drink well, but has decades of life still ahead of it. The lovely bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of plums, black cherries, cigar smoke, Rioja spice tones, a fine base of soil and a fine base of smoky oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely velvety already, with a sappy core, good soil signature and grip, impeccable balance and a very long, refined and ripely tannic finish. While this bottling is starting to really stretch its wings, it is still in climbing mode and will be even better with another five years or more in the cellar. And outstanding Gran Reserva. 2019-2060. **93.**

2009 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The 2009 vintage of Viña Albina Gran Reserva comes in listed at 13.5 percent, the same as the lovely 2011 version. The wine is a lovely synthesis of the inherent elegance of Viña Albina and the riper character of the 2009 vintage, as it offers up a deep and classy nose of red and black cherries, a bit of black raspberry, toasted coconut, spice tones redolent of fresh nutmeg and clove, a fine base of soil and a touch of cigar wrapper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite solid at the core, with ripe tannins, fine focus and grip, impressive complexity and a long, ripe, but perfectly balanced finish. This is an excellent wine in the making, and though it probably cannot quite keep pace with the 2010 and 2011 Viña Albina Gran Reservas, as it does not have quite the same sense of seamless elegance as those two vintages, this is a fine bottle in the making that seems likely to age along the lines of the best of the 1982 Rioja. I would give it a few more years in the cellar to let it open up a bit more before starting to drink it in earnest. 2025-2070. **91.**

2008 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The 2008 vintage of Viña Albina Gran Reserva from Bodegas Riojanas is still fairly youthful in personality, but it has all of the constituent components in place to eventually rank itself up towards the top of recent vintages of this bottling, once it has had a bit more bottle age to fully blossom. The bouquet is pure and precise, offering up a constellation of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil, cloves, a bit of nutskin and a nice foundation of gently spicy, American oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still young, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature and grip, well-integrated tannins and a long, nascently

complex and impeccably balanced finish. This is an excellent wine in the making. 2028-2075. **93.**

2007 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The 2007 vintage does not have a great reputation in Rioja, as it was a cooler vintage and produced lighter-styled wines in general. However, though the 2007 Viña Albina Gran Reserva is not a powerful wine, it is still nicely full-bodied and loaded with personality, complexity and intensity of flavor and there is absolutely nothing “off vintage” about this lovely wine. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of black raspberries, cherries, beautiful spice tones of clove and nutmeg, a touch of spices meats, a lovely base of salty soil tones, a hint of cigar smoke and a fine framing of American oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and beautifully balanced, with great complexity and bounce, tangy acids, modest tannins and a long, very refined finish. I love this wine, which I suspect may put on a bit more weight and get more velvety with further bottle age, but which is already drinking very well indeed. 2020-2055+. **92+.**



2006 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The 2006 vintage in Rioja was the victim of some spring frosts, and then drought conditions in mid-summer, so this was a challenging year for winegrowers in the region. However, the 2006 Viña Albina Gran Reserva has aged better than the overall vintage quality might suggest and today offers up a fully mature, complex bouquet of black cherries, cigar ash, a good base of soil tones, clover-like spice tones and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and tangy, with respectable depth at the core, still a touch of backend tannin, good focus and grip and a long, reasonably complex finish. The difficult growing season of 2006 has produced a Viña Albina Gran Reserva that is a bit more angular on the palate than normal, and the oak is not as seamlessly buried here as is customary in this bottling (as there is just not all

that much stuffing to the wine), but it is complex and tasty at the same time and is certainly a success for the vintage. 2020-2040+. **89.**

2005 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

2005 was a hot summer in Rioja, but this is universally recognized as a very strong vintage for the region. The 2005 Viña Albina Gran Reserva is true to the character of the vintage, offering up impressive depth on both the nose and palate, a good, classic structural chassis and lovely length on the finish. The bouquet is still youthful, but complex and beautifully focused, wafting from the glass in a mix of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a fine range of Rioja spice tones, a bit of celery seed and a lovely framing of American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a superb core of fruit, fine-grained tannins, good acids and grip and a long, beautifully balanced and classy finish. This reminds me quite a bit of the 1982 vintage in its adolescence, and I would think this wine should evolve in much that same direction with further bottle age. Fine juice that is certainly approachable today, but is still in climbing mode and will be even better with further bottle age. 2025-2070. **93.**

2004 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The 2004 Viña Albina Gran Reserva is a beautiful wine that fully underscores just how fine this vintage was in the region. At age sixteen, the wine is just starting to approach its apogee of peak drinkability, where it will comfortably rest for probably the next fifty to seventy-five years! The bouquet wafts from the glass in an utterly refined blend of red and black raspberries, cigar wrapper, toasted coconut, a gorgeous base of salty soil tones, Rioja spice tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, refined and full-bodied, with beautiful transparency and grip, a lovely core of fruit, modest tannins, tangy acids and laser-like focus on the long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Viña Albina is always the more elegant of the two flagship bottlings at Bodegas Riojanas, and this elegance absolutely defines this beautiful 2004 vintage of the Gran Reserva. This is not a blockbuster by any stretch of the imagination, but it is an utterly complete and compelling middleweight! 2024-2080+. **93+.**

2001 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The 2001 vintage was afflicted by spring frosts, which cut back yields in Rioja, but did not dampen quality. The 2001 Viña Albina Gran Reserva shows the lower yields of this year, as it is more concentrated on both the nose and palate than the lovely 2004 vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a wide open and complex mix of red and black cherries, a fine base of soil tones, cigar smoke, cloves, allspice, a touch of tobacco leaf, toasted coconut, a dollop of spices meats and incipient notes of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, complex and focused, with a full-bodied format, a lovely touch of velvetiness on the attack, a fine core, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, vibrant and very classic finish. This has more depth and stuffing than the 2004, but qualitatively, they are both beautiful wines and just two different sides of Viña Albina. 2020-2075. **93+.**

1999 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The 1999 vintage suffered from April frosts and there was rainy period during mid-summer and also around harvest time, so it was a challenging year for the top estates in the region. The 1999 Viña Albina Gran Reserva has aged very nicely and is now a classic middleweight at its peak of maturity, offering up a bright and quite complex nose of raspberries, red and black cherries, cloves, sweet pipe tobacco, salty soil tone, brown spices and a deft touch of American oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, silky and tangy, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine complexity, melted tannins and a long, vibrant and classy finish. There is a bit of

fluidity in the mid-palate here, but this is the only blemish from the very difficult growing season and the wine has really aged superbly well. I love wines like this, with so much personality, still light on their feet and no rough edges! 2020-2045. **90.**

1978 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

As I noted a couple of issues back, in my note on the 1978 Monte Real Gran Reserva, this was a frost vintage in Rioja and was produced from a very short crop as a result. Though the quantity was small, the quality of the wines was excellent and they have aged beautifully. The 1978 Viña Albina Gran Reserva is now fully into its apogee of peak maturity, but with the balance and structure still in place for several decades of further, top flight drinking ahead of it. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined mix of cherries, raspberries, cloves, cinnamon, cigar wrapper, a touch of nutskin, salty soil tones, celery seed and a lovely foundation of American oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, velvety and complex, with impeccable focus and balance, melting tannins and a long, refined and tangy finish. This is an utterly suave middleweight at the peak of its powers. 2020-2050+. **93.**

1975 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The 1975 Viña Albina Gran Reserva is a gorgeous wine at its apogee of peak drinkability at age forty-five, offering up a stunning nose of cherries, raspberries, a hint of blood orange, beautiful spice tones, cinnamon, nutmeg, a lovely base of soil tones, still a touch of cigar wrapper and a suave framing of American oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and silky, with a vivid core of fruit, tangy acids, melted tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the long, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. 1975 was a hot growing season, but the Viña Albina Gran Reserva has retained this cuvée’s inherent sense of elegance and the wine is drinking marvelously today. 2020-2050. **94.**

1970 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The 1970 Viña Albina “Gran Reserva” is an outstanding example of this superb vintage in Rioja. At fifty years of age, the wine is still at the peak of its powers, offering up a beautifully tertiary and spice-laden bouquet of raspberries, desiccated cherries, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, salty soil tones, a bit of cigar wrapper and a nice touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, velvety and perfectly resolved, with a good foundation of tangy acidity, lovely focus and grip, a plump core and a long, elegant and very complex and vibrant finish. I have little doubt that this lovely middleweight has been at its apogee already for twenty-five years, but it continues to drink very nicely and with beautiful complexity. It is probably starting to get to the far side of its plateau and warrants drinking up over the not too distant future, but it has not yet begun its gentle decline. 2020-2040+. **93.**

1952 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The 1952 Rioja vintage was one of the great years of the early, post- Civil War period in Spain, which also saw great years in 1942, 1945, 1947 and 1949. All the way back in 2004 I had the pleasure to drink a bottle of the 1952 Viña Albina “Reserva”, but this was the first time I had ever tasted the Gran Reserva version from this fabled vintage. The wine did not disappoint, as it remains cruising along beautifully in its plateau of maturity, offering up a beautifully resolved and complex bouquet of cherries, plums, black raspberries, a bit of spiced meats, sweet nuttiness, a suave base of soil tones, cigar smoke, fresh nutmeg and a topnote of pipe tobacco. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite vigorous, with a good core of fruit, complex soil tones, a nice spine of acidity and still a bit of backend tannin from the outstanding structure of this vintage. The finish is long, classy and still perfectly balanced. Amazingly, this wine seems likely to outlast the lovely 1970! 2020-2050+. **95.**



1942 Viña Albina Rioja “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Riojanas

The 1942 Viña Albina Gran Reserva is a beautiful example of this legendary Rioja vintage. The gorgeous and still quite vibrant bouquet wafts from the glass in a very refined blend of black cherries, black raspberries, a touch of cigar ash, fresh nutmeg and clove, a gentle touch of meatiness, nutskin, a complex base of dark soil tones, a slightly savory note that recalls turmeric, a bit of bonfire and a topnote of sweet pipe tobacco. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still in its plateau of peak drinkability, with a fine core of fruit, plenty of soil signature, good acids and grip, still a bit of melting tannin and a long, very complex and nicely old-fashioned finish. This is truly an outstanding bottle of great old Rioja, still at the peak of its powers, seventy-eight years out from the vintage! 2020-2045+. **94.**

THE 2018 MÂCONNAIS AND CÔTE CHALONNAISE ROUND TWO (WITH QUITE A BIT OF FINE CHABLIS TOSSED IN)



As I mentioned in my last report a couple of issues back on the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise, I had only tasted some of the very earliest releases from the 2018 vintage, so I wanted to circle back to these two regions again over the summer, as many more of the top cuvées from 2018 are now in the pipeline and getting spread widely around the market. The summer months are when I drink most of my wine from these two lovely regions, so it seemed to make sense to come back to more of these new releases from the lovely 2018 vintage here when others were also likely to avail themselves of the best bottlings in the market. As some unanticipated and high quality Chablis samples showed up at my door as well during the preparation for this issue, I decided that I would incorporate them in this article as well, rather than wait for more Chablis to arrive and do a feature solely on this region. Most of the wines reviewed below are from the fine, ripe and high quality vintage of 2018, but there are also some 2017s and 2016s also sprinkled in here from these three regions, as I am not one who lightly says “no” to offers of white Burgundy showing up at my door, even if they are not from the vintage being focused upon in a given feature!

As I mentioned back in my article on these regions in Issue 86, the 2017 and 2018 vintages are quite different stylistically in both the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise (as well as in Chablis), with the 2017 vintage providing racy, classically-proportioned wines of good, proper ripeness, excellent mineral drive and fine, zesty acidities. The potential Achilles' Heel of the 2017 vintage was the size of the crop in certain vineyards, as it followed on the frost-damaged vintage of 2016, and it is quite typical for the vintage following a badly-frosted year to produce a very large crop in compensation for the small, frosted crop of the previous year. So, vigilance was necessary to not let the vines run rampant with quantity, which would dilute concentration of the 2017s. As readers will recall, this was not the case in Chablis in 2017, as once again the region was hit by frost for the second year in a row, so the previous comments do not apply to Chablis. The 2018s in these regions reflect their warmer, more sun-drenched growing season, and are plusher, more forward wines that are already utterly delicious to drink. As I mentioned in Issue 86, the 2018 vintage in the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise has a bit more inherent variation built into it than is the case further north in the Côte de Beaune, as winter and early spring precipitation varied quite a bit from village to village in the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise and the buildup of subterranean water reserves was quite varied because of this. As drought conditions would play a part in the heat of mid-summer in 2018, some parcels of vines shut down from hydric stress issues, while others had better water reserves and were able to continue to ripen in customary fashion. *Vignerons* were able to compensate for this to some extent by hopping around during harvest, taking physiologically ripe plots first and letting those that were most affected by hydric stress hang a bit longer to ripen more completely.

Having now tasted a much wider spread of appellations and producers from the 2018 vintage, as in my last article, it was really only the earlier-released bottlings that were in the market from 2018, it is easier to sum up the vintage in the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise. There are certainly variations on how ripe wines ended up in 2018 in both regions, based on when parcels reached optimum picking maturity. For vineyards where hydric stress had caused a shut down during the mid-summer, later harvesting allowed for the vines to catch up with those who had not had interruptions in their maturation because of better water reserves during the worst heat of the summer. However, some producers would have had only parcels that were not affected with hydric stress during the growing season, and for them, everything would have ripened up briskly at the same time and some decisions had to be made about which plots of vines to harvest first. Logically, in these cases, *vignerons* decided to bring in their best *terroirs* first, and so one can see some variation in levels of ripeness amongst a single domaine's lineup of 2018s, with quite precise examples of Pouilly-Fuissé or Saint-Véran and slightly more tropically-inclined and gently blowsy examples of Mâcon-Villages level wines. With others, who might have had to stagger picking because of lags in maturation from the drought, there can be more consistency of style to their 2018s, but this is not always a given and varies from estate to estate. In broad terms, these variations have made for a bit of heterogeneity in style of 2018s, while the overall general quality remains quite high.

Generally, the 2018 vintage in both the Mâconnais and Côte Chalonnaise can be summed up as ripe, still nicely soil-driven and varying in structural foundation, depending on when grapes came to maturity and could be picked. Some wines are ripe, classically zesty and well-built for moderate aging, though they are drinking so well out of the blocks that there is no real need to let them rest in the cellar unless one has a backlog of previous vintages that merit drinking up first.

Other 2018s are a bit softer in personality, and can at times, be a bit noticeably higher in alcohol as well, due to having been picked later in a domaine's harvesting sequence, but not having lagged in terms of maturation during the drought of mid-summer. As I noted above, this is more likely to be the case at domaines where everything ripened up at the same time and the higher level appellations ended up being picked first, so this more tropical side of the vintage is most noticeable at the lower level Mâcon bottlings, rather than with the best single vineyards or with examples of Pouilly-Fuissé. However, I should temper this remark by observing that I managed to mostly taste examples of 2018 Pouilly-Fuissé from producers whose parcels of vines are at the northern, higher elevation vineyards around Vergisson and Solutré, rather than the warmer vineyards further south in the appellation that surround the villages of Pouilly, Fuissé and Chaintré. It is certainly possible that these warmer vineyards ended up with more tropical examples of Pouilly-Fuissé in 2018 than those higher elevation sites in the northern sector of the appellation, no matter how the drought affected the maturation of the grapes during the heat of summer. But, the luck of the draw with samples for this report skewed the Pouilly-Fuissé bottlings to the northern sector, where I tasted many truly stellar bottles of wine!

Within the various appellations found in the Mâconnais today, the 2018s from chalkier soils were not always the most blessed in this vintage, as if they had not seen their fair share of winter and early spring precipitation, these soils were more likely to have vines suffering from hydric stress and retarded maturation than vineyards with more clay in their soil compositions. However, where there was sufficient ground water reserves, the chalkier soils did end up producing better wines in this sun-drenched vintage, as they could provide a good vein of minerality to complement the riper fruit tones of 2018. As I said above, there is quite some heterogeneity in style at this level from the drought conditions. But, despite this variation in style, there are an awful lot of really, really good Mâconnais wines that were produced in 2018, so it is just a matter of picking and choosing to get the most complete examples in this vintage. I should mention that these comments are all restricted to those who harvest by hand in the region, as I generally do not get sent samples of producers who are utilizing machine harvesting here, given their importers expectations that my scores would be too low to merit sending the samples in the first place. I remember reading some years ago a piece written by David Schildknecht, whose palate I quite respect, defending some machine-harvested wines, but I have to say that I have yet to find any wine produced by machine harvesting in the Mâconnais that has not had at least some of its quality compromised by such methods. Maybe they are out there and have just not crossed my desk, but today, I am a staunch fan of hand-harvesting in the Mâconnais.

Another stylistic variation that really stood out to me in preparing this report, though I do not know why it would seem so obvious this year, as opposed to in previous vintages, was how much more I preferred wines from the Mâconnais made by barrel-fermentation or barrel aging than those that were crafted exclusively in stainless steel tanks. The casks need not be new (and I actually prefer when the barrels are older in these appellations), but the textural sophistication on the palate of wines fermented or raised in oak was very much in evidence with the 2018s. As I mentioned a few years ago in my historical feature on Domaine des Comtes Lafon, I really like Dominique Lafon's approach to his family's Mâconnais wines, where he is utilizing more and more *demi-muids*, *tonneaux* and small *foudres* for the *elevage* of his Mâcon-villages level wines. Other very top producers, such as Domaine de la Chapelle, Domaine Guerrin, Domaine Jacques Saumaize, Domaine Saumaize-Michelin and Domaine Olivier Merlin, prefer to use a mix of

classic Burgundy casks of varying ages, but with little or a fairly small percentage of new oak, for the *elevage* of their wines. All of them have made great wines in both 2017 and 2018 and I hope that more and more producers in the Mâconnais will be able to use oak for the *elevage* of their wines in the future, as it really does produce a superior wine to my palate.

While many of the above comments about the 2018 vintage referenced the wines of the Côte Chalonnaise as well as the Mâconnais, I have not really tasted all that many 2018 white wines from the former sector of Burgundy yet, as most of the Côte Chalonnaise releases I have tried in these last two articles were still from the exceptionally fine 2017 vintage. I will look forward to tasting more 2018 whites from the Côte Chalonnaise in the next report and hope my general remarks on the region and the vintage still hold water after tasting a wider array of bottlings from this region. As this report also includes a fair number of mostly 2018 Chablis wines, I should revisit that Chablis vintage as well here. More complete coverage of the '18 vintage in Chablis can be found in Issue 84, which focuses on the vintage in Chablis and the Côte d'Or. Generally, the 2018 vintage in Chablis is very successful and more homogenous stylistically than is the case in the Mâconnais, as there were not the same issues with wide variations in winter precipitation leading into the hot summer of 2018. But, as frost damage hit many vineyards in 2017, *vignerons* needed to guard against over-abundance in the vineyards the following year of 2018 which had been badly frosted in 2017. Otherwise, it was a fairly easy growing season in Chablis and the wines have turned out very well, with ripe fruit tones coupled to far better mineral signature than was the case in the last really ripe Chablis vintage of 2015. Most 2018 Chablis have good acidity and lift and are drinking very well in their youth; the samples I received were *villages* level and premier cru from producers I do not typically have time to visit during my November trips to Chablis, but based on the bottles covered below, I will have to make time to visit several more estates there whenever the coronavirus is tamed in the US and I can travel again!

I should also mention that I had a chance while preparing this report to taste a couple of vintages of the white wines from Domaine Elise Villiers in Vézelay, which has a brand new appellation all its own beginning in 2017. Previously, the white wines produced from this small region, just south of Chablis, had to be sold as Bourgogne-Vézelay, but the white wines here now can be sold under their own appellation of Vézelay. The whites are entirely made from chardonnay, with soils quite similar to Chablis. Red wines in Vézelay are made from pinot noir, but must still be sold under the Bourgogne-Vézelay label, as the appellation change only extends to the white wines produced here. Madame Villiers wines were really, really good and I recommend them heartily- particularly the gorgeous, mineral-infused and racy 2017 version!

The following wines are organized by appellation, with Bourgogne Blanc posted first, Cote Chalonnaise second, and then Mâconnais wines following. Amongst the notes for the Mâconnais, I have listed those labeled under the broader Mâcon-Villages first, but have then listed wines from individual communes, such as Milly-Lamartine or Bussières from their more specific appellation, with the communes listed alphabetically from Mâcon-Bussières to Mâcon-Uchizy and Mâcon-Vergisson. Within each communal grouping, the wines are listed first chronologically by vintage and then alphabetically by producer. After these sections, I have grouped Saint-Véran next, followed by Pouilly-Fuissé. As many Pouilly-Fuissé bottlings now include the name of the *lieux à dits* where the wines are produced on the labels, I have arranged

notes alphabetically by vineyard name where appropriate, followed alphabetically by producer. Following the Pouilly-Fuissé tasting notes, I have finished with the notes from Vézelay and then Chablis. With the Chablis notes, all the *villages* level bottlings are grouped together first, followed by an alphabetical listing of premier crus.



Chablis vineyards remaining golden in a fleeting wisp of early November sunshine.

Bourgogne Blanc

2018 Bourgogne Blanc- Domaine Michel Juillot

The Juillot family's example of Bourgogne Blanc is half barrel-fermented in Burgundy casks and half fermented in large *foudres*, with the *elevage* done in the same vessels for nine months prior to bottling. Their 2018 Bourgogne is the first of their 2018 whites that I have tasted and it is a lovely wine, offering up a bright and classy nose of apple, pear, a fine base of chalky soil tones, a bit of beeswax and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows beautiful cut and mineral drive for a 2018, with a lovely core, excellent focus and grip and a very long, impressively complex finish. This is not quite Coche-Dury quality Bourgogne, but it does tower over ninety-five percent of the examples out there and comes very, very highly recommended! 2020-2030. **90.**

Mercrey

2017 Mercrey Blanc “les Champs Martins” 1er Cru- Domaine Michel Juillot

As I mentioned in my note on the 2016, the Mercrey Blanc “les Champs Martins” bottling from Laurent Juillot is barrel-fermented and sees in twenty percent new oak during its *elevage*. The 2017 version is absolutely superb on both the nose and palate, offering up great depth and purity of fruit, outstanding *terroir* and a marvelous girdle of acidity that adds drive and lift on the backend. The gorgeous nose jumps from the glass in a blend of pear, fresh pineapple, beautifully complex limestone minerality, orange blossoms, a hint of beeswax and a lovely foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core, great soil signature, zesty acids and outstanding balance and grip on the long, vibrant and very classy finish. 2020-2030. **91+**.

Mâcon-Villages

2019 Mâcon-Villages- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon (screwcap)

The 2019 Mâcon-Villages from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon is a nicely ripe and expressive wine that shows plenty of aromatic personality as it wafts from the glass in a pretty mix of nectarine, clementine, pretty nuttiness, a sound base of soil and a topnote of musky floral tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and succulent at the core, with just a wisp of CO₂, sound acids and good length and grip on the wide open and inviting finish. This is a very nicely done, and though there is a touch of pinching on the backend from the closure, I am sure that this wine will have all been drunk up long before any reduction comes into play. 2020-2025. **89.**

2018 Mâcon “les Morizottes”- Marie-Pierre Manciat

The Mâcon “les Morizottes” from Marie-Pierre Manciat is produced from vines that average twenty-five years of age and which are all hand harvested. Madame Manciat ferments and ages this bottling entirely in stainless steel. The 2018 les Morizottes offers up a deep and youthful nose of apple, stony soil tones, dried flowers, a bit of almond and a topnote of Mâconnais toastiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and deep at the core, with good acids and grip, fine focus and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is still a touch reticent on the nose, but is already singing on the palate and is a very well-made bottle of Mâcon. I would love to see at least a bit of barrel aging introduced in the cellars for this wine, as I think it would work very well. 2020-2028. **89.**

Mâcon-Bussières

2018 Mâcon-Bussières “Montbrison”- Domaine Jacques Saumaize

The 2018 Mâcon-Bussières “Montbrison” from Domaine Jacques Saumaize is a gorgeous bottle of Mâconnais chardonnay. The bouquet wafts from the glass in an utterly refined and complex blend of pear, almond, apple blossoms, bee pollen, a dollop of buttery oak and a beautiful base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, ripe and zesty, with outstanding mid-palate depth, fine focus and grip, a lovely vein of minerality and a long, bouncy and complex finish. This is a fairly ripe example, but the Mâcon-Bussières is in the southern end of the region, tucked up against the smaller *Roche de Bussière* and has a fine base of limestone soils, which clearly were an advantage in keeping lift and bounce in the hot summer of 2018. 2020-2028. **91.**

Mâcon-Davayé

2018 Mâcon-Davayé “les Belouzes”- Domaine G. Saumaize

Guy Saumaize, and his wife, Annie, took over the reins of their family estate back in 1981, which at that time was known as Domaine des Maillettes. In 2013, the day to day responsibilities passed on to their son Guillaume, who wanted to change the name of the property to the family name, and hence, Domaine G. Saumaize was born, which pays tribute to both father and son. The family farms fourteen and a half hectares of vines, located in the villages of Vergisson, Solutré, Davayé and Prissé, with all harvesting done by hand. Their 2018 Mâcon-Davayé “les Belouzes” is fermented and raised in stainless steel and offers up a fine nose of peach, apple, toasty soil tones, orange blossoms and a touch of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a plump core of fruit, a fine harness of acidity and a long, complex and tasty finish. This is a well-made example. 2020-2027. **88.**

Mâcon Milly-Lamartine

2018 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2018 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon is nicely ripe this year, particularly for this particular bottling, but it retains its customary limestone undertow of soil. The bouquet offers up a complex blend of apple, tangerine, almond, citrus peel, a good base of chalky soil tones and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and zesty, with a full-bodied format, good focus and grip, a lovely core and a long, fairly complex and wide open finish. This is a touch more broad shouldered this year, but still a lovely and quite charming example of Milly-Lamartine. 2020-2030. **90+.**

2017 Mâcon Milly-Lamartine- Château de la Greffière

The 2017 Mâcon Milly-Lamartine from Château de la Greffière hails from three and a half hectares of vines in this appellation, with their vines averaging twenty-five years of age. The Greuzard family ferments and raises this bottling entirely in stainless steel. The 2017 version offers up a classic nose of apple, white peach, a lovely touch of nuttiness, classic “toasty” Mâconnais soil tones and a touch of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, excellent grip, zesty acids and a long, wide open and very user-friendly finish. This is quite well-made and tasty. 2020-2027. **89.**

Mâcon-Prissé

2018 Mâcon-Prissé- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The Mâcon-Prissé bottling from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon is a relatively new addition Dominique Lafon’s lineup of Mâconnais wines, as he did not produce this a few years back when I was writing my feature on his wines. He now owns eighty-eight *ares* of vines in the *lieu à dit* of Verchère in the village, with the youngest vines in this parcel now a bit over twenty-five years of age, so these are hitting their stride as they come into what the French call *un bon age*. The wine is raised in *foudres*, like most of the other Mâconnais level bottlings here and the 2018 offers up a fine nose of pear, nectarine, almond, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a whisper of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely plump at the core, with good acids and grip, a fine signature of soil and a long, juicy and complex finish. Lovely juice. 2020-2030. **91+.**



Mâcon La Roche Vineuse

2018 Mâcon La Roche Vineuse - Château de la Greffière

The 2018 Mâcon La Roche Vineuse from Château de la Greffière is a lovely example of this vintage, with a fine combination of ripe (but not overripe) fruit and a lovely spine of salty minerality running through the wine. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of white peach, apple, the aforementioned salty soil tones, a touch of acacia blossom and just a whisper of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerful in profile for this cuvée, with good acids and grip, a rock solid core and a long, nascently complex and simply packed finish. This has broader shoulders than the Sous le Bois version (see below), due to its deeper soils in sections of the vineyard, but it is a fine bottle nonetheless and folks that may fine some Mâcon-Villages bottlings a little lightweight for their tastes are simply going to love this wines volume and personality! 2020-2027. **89.**

2018 Mâcon La Roche Vineuse “Sous le Bois”- Château de la Greffière

I have been enjoying this bottling of Mâcon La Roche Vineuse from the Greuzard family since the vintages of the mid-1980s, though there are two different cuvées of this wine, with the Sous le Bois hailing from a *lieu à dit* planted to thirty year-old vines that sits at the highest elevation in the appellation. The 2018 Sous le Bois really shows its limestone character in its aromatic constellation of apple, pear, complex, chalky minerality, a whisper of vanillin oak and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and full, with a fine core of fruit, superb mineral drive and cut, fine focus and a long, poised and complex finish that closes with

fine lift. This is very, very good (and quite minerally) Mâcon that really shows off its higher elevation advantage in the vintage of 2018! 2020-2028. **91.**

2018 Mâcon La Roche Vineuse – Domaine Sylvaine et Alain Normand

Alain Normand produces two different bottlings of La Roche Vineuse from his eleven hectares of vines in this appellation, with the oldest parcels reserved for his Vieilles Vignes cuvée. All of his vines are hand-harvested. The regular bottling of La Roche Vineuse is still fermented with indigenous yeasts, with extended lees contact in stainless steel and is bottled the summer or early autumn of the year following the vintage. The 2018 version is excellent, offering up a bright and complex nose of pear, white peach, chalky soil tones, a hint of hazelnut and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a lovely core, very good mineral drive, bouncy acids and lovely focus and lift on the long and complex finish. This is very, very good. 2020-2030. **90.**

2018 Mâcon La Roche Vineuse “Vieilles Vignes” – Domaine Sylvaine et Alain Normand

Alain Normand’s old vine bottling of La Roche Vineuse is from vines planted in the latter half of the 1940s, right after the end of World War II. This wine is barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in casks, with fifteen percent of the oak new each year. The 2018 Vieilles Vignes offers up a deep, ripe and gently new oaky nose of peach, fresh apricot, a fine base of limestone soil tones, hazelnut, orange zest and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with good balance and grip, zesty acids and along, complex and buttery finish. This comes across as a bit riper in personality than the regular La Roche Vineuse in 2018. I like this wine very much, but my gut instincts tell me that the distance between this cuvée and the regular bottling is not quite as wide as usual in 2018, due to the warm growing season. 2020-2030. **90+.**

2017 Mâcon La Roche Vineuse “Vieilles Vignes”- Olivier Merlin

I started working with the wines from Olivier Merlin back in my wine merchant days, with the 1992 being the first vintage I had the pleasure to sell (and drink). Back in those days, there were not all that many really top flight producers in the Mâconnais (André Forest was one) who would hand harvest their entire crop and do some barrel fermentation of their wines. Monsieur Merlin’s La Roche Vineuse was one of those wines and I fell in love from the first vintage. Today, the old vine bottling is barrel-fermented and aged for one year in cask (fifteen percent of the barrels are new each year); it is then assembled in stainless steel and allowed to settle for three to four months prior to bottling. The 2017 version of the old vines cuvée is really superb, offering up a complex and vibrant nose of pear, apple, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of almond, citrus blossoms and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, a zesty girdle of acidity and outstanding focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is about as good an example of Mâconnais as one can find! 2020-2028. **92.**

Mâcon-Uchizy “les Maranches”

2018 Mâcon-Uchizy “les Maranches”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The vineyard of les Maranches in the village of Uchizy is all *terres blanches* and one of the chalkiest single vineyard bottlings in Dominique Lafon’s Mâconnais lineup. The 2018 version couples the nicely ripe fruit of the vintage to this lovely foundation of *terroir*, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, pear, citrus zest, a touch of beeswax, chalky minerality and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied, focused and complex,

with a lovely core, good soil signature, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced and classy finish. This is really a good example of the vintage. 2020-2030+. **92.**

Mâcon-Vergisson

2018 Mâcon-Vergisson “les Rochers”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

The Mâcon-Vergisson “les Rochers” from Domaine Guerrin hails from a pair of vineyards with different soil compositions. One sits up at high altitude on hard limestone and the other has far more clay in its composition, so as to provide more depth of fruit to augment the racy minerality and cut of the former. The blend is fermented and aged in a combination of stainless steel and cement tanks and sees no oak during its *elevage*. The 2018 les Rochers delivers a fine nose of pear, apple, a touch of almond, chalky soil tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and wide open in personality, with a fine core, good soil signature and lovely cut and grip on the long and complex finish. This is a very good Mâcon. 2020-2025. **89+.**

Mâcon-Verzé

2018 Mâcon-Verzé- Domaine Nicolas Maillet

Nicolas Maillet took over his family’s eight hectare estate in 1999. Previously, his father had sold off all of the estate’s production to a local cooperative. Nicolas farms his vines organically and was certified by Ecocert in 2010. He is currently in conversion to biodynamic farming, which he began in 2013. He harvests by hand and his wines are fermented in epoxy-lined cement vats and see no oak casks during their *elevage*. The 2018 Mâcon-Verzé from Monsieur Maillart is produced from forty-five year-old vines and offers up a fine nose of peach, apple, chalky soil tones, a nice touch of Mâconnais toastiness and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is ripe, deep and full-bodied, with good soil signature, a fine girdle of acidity and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This has the stuffing of the 2018 vintage, coupled to the inherent minerality of Verzé. Good juice. 2020-2030. **90.**

2018 Mâcon-Verzé “Le Chemin Blanc”- Domaine Nicolas Maillet

The Le Chemin Blanc bottling from Nicolas Maillart is his oldest vine cuvée, as this parcel of vines is fully eighty years of age. The wine is handled the same in the cellars as his straight Mâcon-Verzé bottling. The 2018 Le Chemin Blanc delivers a deep and quite refined aromatic constellation of apple, pear, hazelnut, chalky soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with lovely acidity and grip, a fine core and impressive length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. This is more closed than the regular bottling of 2018 Mâcon-Verzé and deserves at least a year or two in the cellar to blossom more completely. It will be excellent in due course. 2022-2035. **91+.**

Viré-Clessé

2018 Viré-Clessé- Domaine Pascal Bonhomme

The regular bottling of 2018 Viré-Clessé from Pascal Bonhomme is produced from vines that are thirty-five years of age and the wine is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel. The wine offers up a lovely aromatic constellation- ripe, pure and soil-driven, combining notes of pear, white peach, complex, chalky minerality, musky white flowers and a topnote of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely plump at the core, with a fine girdle of acidity, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is excellent juice. 2020-2030. **92.**

2018 Viré-Clessé “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Pascal Bonhomme

The old vine bottling from Monsieur Bonhomme is made from sixty to seventy year-old vines and twenty percent of the cuvée barrel-fermented and aged in older barrels. The 2018 Vieilles Vignes offers up a lovely nose of apple, pear, a touch of hazelnut, a fine base of limestone soil tones, orange blossoms and just a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and nicely zesty, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral drive and grip, bright acids and a long, nascently complex finish. I would opt to give the old vine cuvée a couple of years' worth of bottle age and let this blossom, while drinking Monsieur Bonhomme's regular bottling. 2022-2032. **92+**.

2016 Viré-Clessé “les Vercherres”- Jean Rijckaert

The 2016 Viré-Clessé “les Vercherres” from Jean Rijckaert has evolved nicely since I last drank a bottle back in 2018, though it is certainly quite mature today and probably will want drinking up over the next few years. The wine offers up a lovely patina of maturity in its blend of pear, fresh apricot, nutmeg, a good base of chalky soil tones, buttery oak and a touch of walnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with still a good core of fruit, fine balance and grip and a long, vibrant and gently tertiary finish. This has aged quite nicely and is at its peak of maturity today, but it has also evolved far faster than I would have imagined when I first tasted it back in the spring of 2018. Drink up. 2020-2022. **91**.



Saint-Véran

2018 Saint-Véran- Château de la Greffière

The Greuzard family's bottling of Saint-Véran is a relatively new addition to the domaine's lineup (meaning they did not make it when I first started selling the domaine's wines in the late '80s and early '90s). It is made from a parcel of twenty-five year-old vines and is barrel-fermented. The 2018 Saint-Véran offers up a refined bouquet of pear, apple, chalky minerality, white flowers and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and sports lovely depth at the core, with fine soil undertow, zesty acids and a long, wide open and complex finish. This is a fine example. 2020-2030. **91.**

2018 Saint-Véran- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The 2018 Saint-Véran from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon is really a lovely example of the vintage, combining beautifully ripe fruit tones with a fine base of soil elements and just a touch of buttery oak. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a sophisticated blend of pear, apple, hazelnut, chalky soil tones, fruit blossoms and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent mineral undertow, very impressive acidity for the vintage and a long, detailed and complex finish. This is gorgeous Saint-Véran! 2020-2032+. **92+.**

2018 Saint-Véran “Poncetys”- Domaine Jacques Saumaize

The Saint-Véran “Poncetys” from Domaine Jacques Saumaize is composed of some of the family's very oldest vines, as the parcels here were planted at the end of World War II in 1944 and 1945. Like the old vine bottling in the *lieu à dit* of En Crêches, this wine is barrel-fermented and sees twenty percent new wood. The 2018 Poncetys offers up a superb bouquet of apple, white peach, a touch of hazelnut, a fine base of soil, just a hint of buttery oak and a topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with excellent balance and acidity, a rock solid core and outstanding length and grip on the complex finish. The soils here have more clay than in les Crêches, which gives the wine a bit broader shoulders and superb mid-palate depth. But, the exposition is plain East, which also allows the wine to retain acidity and lift- a very lovely combination. 2020-2030+. **92+.**

2018 Saint-Véran “Vielles Vignes des Crêches”- Domaine Jacques Saumaize

The Saumaize family's old vine parcels in En Crêches are all in excess of fifty years of age, and this wine too is completely barrel-fermented and raised in twenty percent new oak for its *elevage*. The soils here have a higher limestone content than those in Poncetys, which gives the wine a different and racier personality, while still retaining that nice old vine creaminess to the fruit at the core. The 2018 version offers excellent aromatic sophistication in its blend of pear, apple, almond, chalky soil tones, a nice framing of oak and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and nicely mineral in personality, with a rock solid core, fine acids and grip and a long, balanced and complex finish. Both of these old vine bottlings of Saint-Véran from the Saumaize family are outstanding! 2020-2030+. **92.**

2017 Saint-Véran “Le Clos Vessats”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

The Saint-Véran “Le Clos Vessats” from Domaine Guerrin et Fils is the youngest vine cuvée from the estate, as these vines are only fifteen years of age right now. This is a two hectare *clos* that is fairly low in altitude at two hundred meters, but a steep hillside with south by southwesterly exposition and a predominance of clay in the blend of limestone and clay in the soils. The combination of lower altitude, plenty of clay and afternoon sun expositions lends itself to early and hearty ripening of the fruit, which was a fine combination with the style of the 2017

vintage. The nose jumps from the glass in a fine mix of pear, apple, acacia blossoms, a lovely base of soil tones, a bit of fresh almond and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, pure, focused and full, with a lovely core of fruit, a zesty girdle of acidity and balance and grip on the focused and complex finish. This is really a lovely and vibrant example of Saint-Véran. 2020-2030. **91+**.

Pouilly-Fuissé

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “Aux Bouthières”- Domaine de la Chapelle (Catherine et Pascal Rollet)

The Aux Bouthières bottling from Domaine de la Chapelle is barrel-fermented and raised in a mix of new, one wine and two wine casks. This single vineyard bottling hails from clay and limestone soils and the 2018 is quite refined on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up a fine blend of apple, pear, almond, chalky soil tones, buttery oak and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and shows off a fine girdle of acidity, with fine mid-palate depth, excellent balance and grip and a long, complex and classy finish. This is nicely ripe, but has a sense of *nervosité* that adds lift on the backend and will allow it to age long and gracefully. 2020-2032. **91+**.

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de la Chapelle (Catherine et Pascal Rollet)

The Vieilles Vignes bottling of Pouilly-Fuissé from the Rollets is made from a vineyard selection of chardonnay vines from four different *lieux à dits*, with the criteria being that the vines must be between sixty and eighty years of age. One quarter of the cuvée is fermented in stainless steel, with the remainder barrel-fermented, with fifteen percent of the casks new. The 2018 version is a beautiful wine, with lovely ripeness and vibrancy, coupled to the extra depth and soil signature from these old vines. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, white peach, a touch of tangerine, complex soil tones, orange zest and a suave foundation of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral drive and grip, zesty acids and excellent focus on the long and complex finish. This is first class Pouilly-Fuissé! 2020-2035. **93**.

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “Clos de la Chapelle”- Domaine de la Chapelle (C. et P. Rollet)

The Clos de la Chapelle vineyard lies right next to the domaine and is the oldest vines owned by the Rollet family, as this parcel was planted in 1922! The entire cuvée is barrel-fermented, with one quarter of the casks new and the others being “two wine” barrels. The 2018 Clos de la Chapelle is outstanding on the nose, jumping from the glass in a blend of pear, nectarine, almond, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, a touch of acacia blossoms and a suave base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full and zesty, with great focus and grip, lovely mineral drive and a long, vibrant and very complex finish. This is simply stunning Pouilly-Fuissé! 2020-2035+. **94**.

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

The Guerrin family’s Vieilles Vignes cuvée is selected from several vineyard sources, all in the village of Vergisson, with the vines a minimum of forty years of age. The wine is barrel-fermented and aged in fifteen percent new wood. Their 2018 Vieilles Vignes is a beautiful example of the vintage, delivering a lovely and complex nose of pear, apple, orange zest, chalky soil tones, gently musky floral tones and a nice, discreet foundation of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and very racy for a 2018, with a full-bodied and complex personality, a lovely core of fruit, fine soil signature and a long, refined and vibrant finish. This is dynamite Pouilly-Fuissé! 2020-2035+. **93**.



2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “La Maréchaude”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

The La Maréchaude from the Guerrin family is produced from sixty year-old vines that lie mid-slope in Vergisson, so with more clay here than up closer to the foot of the mountain. The wine is barrel-fermented in a combination of two hundred and twenty-eight and four hundred liter casks, with twenty percent new wood. The 2018 La Maréchaude delivers a beautiful bouquet of pear, apple, almond, spring flowers, a fine base of soil and a nice framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and racy, with an excellent core, lovely soil signature and grip, a fine girdle of acidity and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is outstanding juice. 2020-2035. **93.**

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “Sur La Roche”- Domaine Guerrin et Fils

The Sur La Roche bottling from Domaine Guerrin is produced from fifty-five year-old vines, that sit high up in this stony limestone vineyard, situated right at the base of the Roche de Vergisson. This is a cool and very windy *terroir*, which no doubt was a serious advantage in the hot summer of 2018. The Guerrin family ages this wine in twenty percent new oak, and the 2018 version offers up a lovely nose of delicious apple, pear, almond, a superb base of limestone minerality, honeysuckle and a discreet foundation of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully soil-driven, with a great core of pristine fruit, bright acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is nicely ripe, but also precise, mineral and racy. Stellar juice! 2020-2040. **94.**

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “En Chatenay”- Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon

The Pouilly-Fuissé from Les Héritiers du Comte Lafon hails from a parcel of fifty-plus year-old vines in the *lieu à dit* of En Chatenay in the village of Vergisson. The soils here are clay and iron over the mother rock of limestone. The wine is aged in used casks for twelve months, prior to racking to stainless steel tank for six more months of *elevage* prior to bottling. The 2018 En Chatenay offers up a lovely, youthful bouquet of apple, white peach, almond, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of iodine and a beautifully discreet foundation of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip and a long, nascently complex and racy finish. The girdle of acidity here is simply outstanding for a 2018 Mâconnais wine! This is first rate Pouilly-Fuissé! 2020-2040. **93.**

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “Maison du Villard”- Château de Lavernette

Xavier de Boissieu currently is in charge of the vineyards and winemaking at this family estate, and he has made the move over to biodynamic farming from the *lutte raisonnée* practices of his father. He began the conversion in 2006 and the vines were certified in 2010. His Maison du Villard bottling of Pouilly-Fuissé is his old vine cuvée, made from four parcels in the village of Chaintré in the southern part of the appellation, which were planted respectively in 1959, 1964, 1970 and 1971. The wine is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel. The 2018 version offers up a beautifully fresh and vivid nose of apple, pear, stony minerality, a hint of honeysuckle and a dollop of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet for a 2018 (particularly from the southern end of the AOC), with a lovely core of fruit, good mineral drive and grip, a fine girdle of acidity and a very long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a lovely example of an un-oaked, old vine bottling of Pouilly-Fuissé! 2020-2030. **92.**

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Petites Bruyères”- Marie-Pierre Manciat

The 2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “les Petites Bruyères” from Marie-Pierre Manciat is machine-harvested and fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks. It offers up a bright bouquet of nectarine, apple, chalky soil elements, fruit blossoms and a bit of upper register nuttiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and has a very good core of fruit, with good soil undertow, zesty acids and good length and grip on the flavorful finish. I would love to see this wine hand-harvested, as it lacks a bit of precision and I suspect this would jump up if the bunches were collected by hand. Though this is tasty, there is clearly even more potential here than is currently being realized with this bottling. 2020-2028. **89.**

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “Les Courtelongs”- Domaine Jacques Saumaize

The *lieu à dit* of Les Courtelongs lies on the eastern flank of the Roche de Solutré, with a very stony base of limestone topsoil. The family’s vines here are sixty years of age. Jacques Saumaize barrel-ferments this bottling and ages it in cask, with twenty percent new oak used each year. The 2018 Les Courtelongs offers up a beautiful bouquet of pear, delicious apple, almond, a lovely base of chalky minerality, white lilies and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, bright and full-bodied, with a beautiful vein of minerality running from start to finish, a lovely core of pure fruit, zesty acids and great length and grip on the poised and impeccably balanced finish. This is so precise and classic- especially for a 2018! 2020-2035. **93.**

2018 Pouilly-Fuissé “La Maréchaude”- Domaine Jacques Saumaize

The vineyard of La Maréchaude is located on the southern flank of the Roche de Vergisson, about mid-slope, with deep clay soils pockmarked with white stones. The Saumaize family has three distinct parcels of vines in this *lieu à dit*, with the oldest plot being eighty years of age. Like all of the family’s Pouilly-Fuissé bottlings, it is barrel-fermented and raised in

twenty percent new oak. The 2018 La Maréchaude delivers fine aromatic complexity in its mix of pear, apple, hazelnut, a lovely base of soil (albeit, not particularly chalky in character) and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and pure, with a full-bodied format, a rock solid core of fruit, bright, snappy acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Not surprisingly, this is more fruit-driven in personality than the Les Courtelongs bottling, but every bit as high quality. 2020-2035. **92+**.

2017 Pouilly-Fuissé “Clos des Quarts” Monopole- Château des Quarts

Château des Quarts is owned by Olivier Merlin and Dominique Lafon. The Clos des Quarts is a monopole vineyard, but *Messieurs* Merlin and Lafon made two bottlings from it in 2017, as there is a parcel here of very old vines that were planted in 1917 and they were bottled on their own this year, to celebrate their one hundredth birthday. However, the rest of the cuvée shows no signs of suffering from not having those old vines in the blend, as it offers up a superb bouquet of pear, fresh apricot, almond, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a nice foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, great acids and grip and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. The 2017 Clos des Quarts has a bit of a new oaky personality to it, but is very well done in this idiom and is outstanding juice! 2020-2035+. **93+**.



The Roche de Vergisson, with the Roche de Solutré in the background, towering over the southern Mâcon.

2016 Pouilly-Fuissé “Les Chevières”- Olivier Merlin

The Pouilly-Fuissé “Les Chevières” from Olivier Merlin is made from a parcel of seventy-five year-old vines, with the *argilo-calcaire* soils having a vein of iron oxide running through them. The wine is barrel-fermented and aged in cask, with ten percent new oak, for eighteen months prior to bottling. The 2016 Les Chevières offers up an excellent bouquet of apple, peach, hazelnut, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, a good chassis of acidity and fine length and grip on the complex finish. The 2016 vintage was a short crop from the frost damage in the spring and this shows in the relative concentration of this wine, but the wine is complex and zesty and really quite refined, despite its rather atypically powerful personality in this vintage. 2020-2030. **92.**

2015 Pouilly-Fuissé “Autour de la Roche”- Domaine J. A. Ferret

The 2015 Autour de la Roche bottling from Domaine Ferret is evolving nicely, but it is starting to show its alcohol a bit on the backend (it comes in listed at 13.5 percent in this ripe vintage, but was likely just a bit higher) and was probably a bit more interesting to drink upon release. The nose today offers up scents of apple, pear, hazelnut, a bit of chalky soil and a topnote of browned butter. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and still nicely zesty, but with the core starting to fade a bit, so that the wine is getting a bit hollow in the mid-palate and the other elements are no longer fully buffered by this component, so that both the acids and the alcohol stick out on the finish. This was very, very good in its youth, but the bloom is off the rose, so drink up. 2020-2022. **87.**



Vézelay

The *Appellation Contrôlée* regulations changed here starting with the 2017 vintage, so that the handful of growers in this lovely valley just south of Chablis can now simply label their wines as Vézelay (rather than Bourgogne Vézelay as was required previously) for their chardonnay-based bottlings. For those growing pinot noir here, the AOC remains Bourgogne Vézelay rouge for the time being, but this may change similarly in the near future.

2017 Vézelay “Le Clos”- Domaine Elise Villiers

Elise Villiers makes lovely wines and these are some of the best values in white Burgundy that one can find today. She is one of only four owners of vines in this lovely, steep hillside vineyard on the eastern side of the Vézelay valley, with her vines having been planted in 1976. She ages one-third of this cuvée in new and older *demi-muids*. The 2017 version is lovely, offering up a vibrant bouquet of green apple, lemon, chalky minerality, a touch of straw, white flowers and a gentle foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, deep and full-bodied, with a lovely core, racy acids and superb mineral drive on the long and complex finish. This will age very well indeed and is about as fine a Chablis substitute as one can find, or if you prefer, just a stellar example of the well-kept secret of Vézelay! 2020-2030+. **90+**.

2016 Bourgogne Vézelay “Le Clos”- Domaine Elise Villiers

As noted above, this is the exact same wine as the 2017, but the AOC regulations had not yet changed, so that the 2016 had to be labeled as Bourgogne Vézelay. The 2016 Le Clos is a lovely wine that is blossoming nicely, offering up scents of pear, apple, orange zest, limestone minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off fine mid-palate depth, with lovely acids and grip, good balance and a fairly long, complex finish. I assume this was hit by the spring frosts of 2016, and consequently, it is not quite as classically structured as the beautiful 2017 version, but for drinking over the next few years, this will be lovely. 2020-2024. **89**.

Petit Chablis, Chablis AC and Vieilles Vignes

2018 Petit Chablis- Domaine Samuel Billaud

The 2018 Petit Chablis from Samuel Billaud is a good follow-up to the strong 2017 version. The wine offers lovely depth and brightness on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, green apple, flinty minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely ripe at the core, with good focus and grip, sound framing acids and sneaky length on the well-balanced finish. This is not overly complex, but it is pleasingly plump in the mid-palate and tasty. 2020-2025. **88**.

2018 Chablis- Domaine Samuel Billaud

As I mentioned in my review of the 2017 version, Samuel Billaud’s *villages* bottling is sourced primarily from the excellent *lieu à dit* of les Pargues, with the wine fermented and raised solely in stainless steel. The 2018 example delivers a superb bouquet of green apple, lemon, dried flowers and very fine base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a fine core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and grip and a long, vibrant and complex finish. This is a first class example of AC. 2020-2035. **91**.

2018 Chablis- Domaine des Hâtes (Pierrick Laroche)

Pierrick Laroche only produced his first vintage in 2010, having pieced together a small domaine from some of his father’s vines (the production of which the elder Laroche sold off to the cooperative, *La Chablissienne*) and has slowly augmented his first parcels with further plots.

Almost all of his *villages* parcels are in the commune of Maligny, averaging thirty years of age and this cuvée is raised in stainless steel. The 2018 AC offers up a pretty bouquet of lemon, apple, flinty minerality, dried flowers and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely tensile for a 2018, with a good core, fine flinty soil signature, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is very good *villages*. 2020-2035. **90.**

2018 Chablis- Domaine Gilbert Picq et Ses Fils

The brothers Didier and Pascal Picq took over for their father all the way back in 1976. The family domaine is in the village of Chichée, where the brothers farm by *lutte raisonnée* and ferment with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel and raise all of the cuvées in tank. Their 2018 Chablis AC is quite a racy example of the vintage, offering up a youthful nose of lemon, pink grapefruit, flinty minerality, lime peel and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, bright, full-bodied and quite mineral-infused, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is an excellent *villages* that should age long and gracefully. 2020-2035+. **90.**

2018 Chablis “En Vaudécorse”- Domaine Gilbert Picq et Ses Fils

The Picq family’s En Vaudécorse bottling is from a top of the hill parcel of vines planted in 1980, which is blended into the regular *villages* except when the brothers feel the vintage is exceptional enough that it merits being bottled on its own. The 2018 version is lovely, though it is useful and one wants to give it a bit of air if drinking it now. It delivers a fine aromatic constellation of lemon, green apple, limestone minerality, white flowers, a hint of chicken broth and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very precise, with a lovely core of fruit, impressive mineral undertow, snappy acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is premier cru quality without a doubt! 2020-2040. **91.**

2018 Chablis “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Gilbert Picq et Ses Fils

The Vieilles Vignes bottling from the Picq brothers is hails from vines that are at least seventy years-old and grow in parcels just downslope from En Vaudécorse. The bouquet is youthfully complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of grapefruit, lemon, beautiful limestone minerality, dried flowers and a hint of the chicken brother to come with extended bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and electric in acidity, with a superb core, great mineral drive, precise focus and grip and a long, racy and still quite youthful finish. This kind of cut and grip in a 2018 Chablis is almost unheard of and augurs extremely well for its future longevity. I would opt for giving this at least a few years in the cellar to loosen its girdle of acidity a bit. Stellar juice. 2023-2045. **92.**

Chablis Premier Cru

2018 Chablis “Fourchaume- l’Homme Mort”- Domaine des Hâtes (Pierrick Laroche)

I have been a fan of the l’Homme Mort section of Fourchaume since I was introduced to the *terroir* with the wines of Domaine Boudin in the mid-1990s, but it is seldom bottled solely on its own. Pierrick Laroche owns just over a hectare in l’Homme Mort, with his vines thirty years of age. His 2018 version is a very fine example of this *terroir*, delivering a fine aromatic blend of pear, apple, flinty soil tones, a touch of straw and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, deep and full-bodied, with an excellent core of fruit, fine transparency and grip, bright acids and a long, wide open and complex finish. This has the succulence of the 2018 vintage, coupled to fine mineral undertow and a good girdle of acidity. 2020-2040. **92.**

2018 Chablis “les Fourneaux”- Domaine Samuel Billaud

The 2018 Chablis “les Fourneaux” from Domaine Samuel Billaud has a fine girdle of acidity for the vintage and I like the backend tension on this wine. The bouquet offers up a youthful blend of pear, apple, a bit of lemon peel, straw, dried flowers, a hint of oak and a good base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still fairly primary in personality, with a lovely core, good mineral undertow and grip and a long, zesty finish. There is good complexity here, but the wine is a bit buttoned up behind its youthful structure right now and really deserves a year or two in the cellar to settle in and blossom. All of the constituent components are here for a lovely bottle, but show it just a bit of patience! 2022-2040+. **90+**.

2018 Chablis “Mont de Milieu”- Domaine Samuel Billaud

Samuel Billaud’s Mont de Milieu is excellent in 2018, offering up good, ripe and fresh fruit tones, lovely soil signature and a fine girdle of acidity to carry it nicely for at least a couple of decades. Readers may recall that all of Monsieur Billaud’s premier crus see fifteen percent new oak, but with the wines raised in four hundred and fifty and six hundred liter *demi-muids*. The 2018 Mont de Milieu is already beautiful expressive on the nose, delivering scents of lemon, apple, a lovely base of chalky and oyster shell minerality, white flowers, citrus peel, paraffin and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a superb core of fruit, excellent mineral drive and cut, fine focus and a long, complex and snappy finish. This is a superb 2018 premier cru! 2020-2045+. **93**.

2018 Chablis “Montée de Tonnerre”- Domaine Samuel Billaud

Samuel Billaud’s bottling of Montée de Tonnerre is twenty-five percent barrel-fermented, with this quarter of the cuvée fermented in six hundred liter *tonneaux*. The 2018 vintage offers up beautiful precision and vibrancy in its aromatic constellation of lemon, apple, chalky minerality, white lilies, a touch of beeswax and a nice, gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and pure, with a fine core of fruit, good soil inflection and bounce, a good girdle of acidity and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is already very tasty, but there is clearly another layer of hidden complexity here that will unfold if the wine is given some time in the cellar. 2020-2045. **93**.

2018 Chablis “Montmains”- Domaine Samuel Billaud

The 2018 Montmain from Monsieur Billaud is every bit as racy and vibrant on the palate than the Mont de Milieu, and shares the same lovely sense of aromatic generosity and complexity. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined mix of lemon, green apple, chalky soil tones, dried flowers, bee pollen and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with fine mineral drive, a good girdle of acidity and excellent bounce on the long and complex finish. This is singing right out of the blocks, but should age quite gracefully as well. 2020-2045. **92**.

2018 Chablis “Séchet” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Samuel Billaud

Monsieur Billaud’s old vine bottling of Séchet hails from a parcel of seventy-plus year-old vines in the larger cru of Vaillons. It is fermented and raised in a combination of both stainless steel tanks and older casks. The 2018 version is a beautiful wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of apple, lemon, wet stone minerality, dried flowers and just a whisper of oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, lovely grip and backend bounce and a long, zesty and beautifully balanced finish. This is just lovely. 2020-2045. **92+**.

2018 Chablis “Vaillons” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Samuel Billaud

The old vines in Samuel Billaud’s parcel of Vaillons are seventy-one years of age. His 2018 version is really lovely, delivering a complex bouquet of lemon, apple, beeswax, oyster shell, chalky minerality, white flowers and just a whisper of vanillin oak (from the older casks used to raise part of the cuvée). On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a rock solid core of fruit, lovely mineral undertow, zesty acids and lovely balance and grip on the long and zesty finish. This is absolutely first class Vaillons. 2020-2045. **93.**

2018 Chablis “Vaucoupin”- Domaine Dampfrères

The 2018 Chablis “Vaucoupin” from Domaine Dampfrères is a fine and very mineral interpretation of this vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of apple, pear, pulverized limestone, straw and a bit of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and very soil-driven, with an almost chalk dusty interpretation of soil, a good framing of acidity and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is a very well-made bottle of premier cru. 2020-2035. **91.**

2018 Chablis “Vaucoupin”- Domaine Gilbert Picq et Ses Fils

The premier cru bottling of Vaucoupin from Didier and Pascal Picq was planted in 1989, on a very steep section of the vineyard. Their 2018 Vaucoupin delivers a fine nose of lemon, green apple, pink grapefruit, flinty minerality, straw and a topnote of lime peel. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with lovely focus and balance, zesty acids and fine grip on the long and complex finish. As this parcel faces due south, it is a touch riper than the Vieilles Vignes bottling and hence, though still zesty, less tensile structurally. 2020-2040. **92.**

2017 Chablis “les Châtillons” - Domaine des Hâtes (Pierrick Laroche)

The les Châtillons bottling hails from a one hectare parcel of vines that Monsieur Laroche owns in the commune of Fontenay, where the soils are more chalky than in his other, more heavily clay-based *villages* parcels, so Pierrick bottles this wine on its own. Fifteen percent of the cuvée is raised in older oak casks and *demi-muids*, which is then assembled with the portion raised in stainless steel, and the wine is given a full year and a half of *elevage* prior to bottling. The 2017 les Châtillons is really a lovely wine, with the *nervosité* of the 2017 vintage beautifully synthesized to the limestone character of these parcels. The bouquet offers up a bright and youthful blend of lemon, green apple, a superb base of chalky minerality, spring flowers and a bit of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and racy, with good mid-palate depth, excellent mineral drive and a long, zesty and complex finish. This does not have the early generosity of the 2018 straight *villages* bottling, but it is inherently more complex and mineral and will be the slightly superior bottle with a bit of cellaring. 2021-2035. **90+.**



Chablis Grand Cru

2018 Chablis “Blanchot”- Domaine Samuel Billaud

This is the first vintage where I have tasted Monsieur Billaud’s example of Blanchot, and I was quite impressed with the wine. The 2018 Blanchot is nicely ripe, complex and defined by its underlying *terroir*, offering up a nascently complex bouquet of pear, white peach, chalky soil tones, a touch of beeswax, gently musky floral tones redolent of honeysuckle and a deft foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate is bright, full-bodied, ripe and wide open in personality, with a good core of fruit, fine mineral undertow, zesty acids and lovely length and grip on the complex and succulent finish. This is one of those delicious 2018 Chablis that is quite approachable out of the blocks, and though it is a bit riper than a classic vintage, there is no shortage of Blanchot personality here. Good juice, but for longer-term cellaring, it is hard not to think that some of the more structured Billaud 2018 premier crus like Montée de Tonnerre, Mont de Milieu or Vaillons might equal this wine in the cellar in this vintage. 2020-2045. **92.**

2018 Chablis “les Bougros”- Domaine Samuel Billaud

The 2018 Bougros from Samuel Billaud is a lovely wine, but, out of the blocks, it is one of the more open grand crus from the estate. This is of course to be expected, as this is one of the warmer microclimates amongst the grand cru vineyards. The wine offers up a ripe and pure bouquet of pear, a hint of tangerine, a beautifully complex base of chalky soil tones, paraffin and a beautifully restrained framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe, focused and vibrant, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral drive and bounce, lovely acids and a

long, complex and quite wide open finish. This wine still has more complexity to deliver with further bottle age, but of all these superb Samuel Billaud 2018 grand crus, this is the one that is really drinking with generosity right out of the blocks! 2020-2060. **93+**.

2018 Chablis “les Clos”- Domaine Samuel Billaud

Unlike Monsieur Billaud’s bottling of les Preuses, his les Clos is entirely barrel-fermented and aged three year-old in four hundred and fifty liter *demi-muids* (the les Preuses is partially fermented in stainless steel before receiving a similar *elevage*). The 2018 les Clos delivers a refined bouquet of lemon, pear, apple, flinty minerality, a nice touch of oyster shell, paraffin, acacia blossoms and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully endowed at the core, with good ripe fruit, excellent acidity and grip, lovely focus and a long, vibrant and very well-balanced finish. This is a first class example of les Clos! It is not quite as racy as the 2018 les Preuses, but it has outstanding depth and backend palate authority. 2022-2055. **94**.

2018 Chablis “les Preuses”- Domaine Samuel Billaud

The les Preuses bottling from Samuel Billaud hails from a parcel of seventy year-old vines. Part of the cuvée is barrel-fermented in older casks, the rest in stainless steel, and then everything is blended and raised for one year in three year-old, four hundred and fifty *demi-muids* prior to bottling. The 2018 les Preuses delivers beautiful aromatic purity in its constellation of pear, apple, beeswax, a complex base of limestone minerality, white lilies and a touch of vanillin oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and racy, with a rock solid core of fruit, great mineral drive, lovely precision and cut and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is still a young example of Preuses, but it is already delicious and this wine will face a serious threat of infanticide in most cellars, as it is going to be awfully difficult to keep one’s hands off of bottles! Still, I would try to give it at least a few years in the cellar and really let it stretch its wings! 2024-2060. **95**.

2018 Chablis “les Preuses”- Domaine Dampfrères

The les Preuses bottling from the brothers Dampfrères hails from a parcel of vines that range from fifty to seventy-two years of age. Thirty-five percent of the cuvée is barrel-fermented and raised in cask, with the balance raised in stainless steel. Their 2018 Preuses offers up a complex nose of apple, wet stone minerality, straw, dried flowers and a hint of paraffin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and has a good core of fruit, with excellent mineral drive and cut, good balance and a long, nascently complex finish. This is really well-structured for a 2018 and could do with a bit of bottle age to fully blossom. It is not the most elegant examples of les Preuses right out of the blocks, but the constituent components here are quite strong and I have the gut feeling that a few years in the cellar will really allow this wine to come into its own. And, by the way, it also happens to be Kosher for Passover, which makes it the best Kosher wine I have ever tasted, but quite some margin! 2023-2055. **92+**.

2018 Chablis “Vaudésir ”- Domaine Samuel Billaud

The 2018 Vaudésir from Domaine Billaud is really a beautiful example of the vintage, with lovely purity and focus on both the nose and palate. The top notch bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones, beeswax, white lilies and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and cut, a fine girdle of acidity, lovely undertow of limestone and a long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is really good, but give it a bit of bottle age to allow its secondary layers to unfurl. 2024-2060. **94**.